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"Behold Belle Isle upon a lame old nag." — Page 286.

THE BELLE ISLERS

A NOVEL

BY

RICHARD BRINSLEY NEWMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY
WALLACE GOLDSMITH



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The Belle Islers.

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FOREWORD

THE MANUSCRIPT FOUND IN A BARREL

"HERE it is!" exclaimed a Voice of Triumph.

"What?" said I, absently turning a phrase without turning my head.

"The Belle Islers," said the Voice of Triumph.

Words less momentous have changed the face of the world. For instance, what if Eve had said *No*, instead of *Yes?* Where would we be, all of us? Waiting for chances to be born! And what if those three little words, *The Belle Islers*, had never been spoken? — But I anticipate.

Nothing was farther from my thoughts that fatal Friday afternoon than to inaugurate a new Era. On the contrary, I was innocently engaged in amusing the baby during the prolonged and mysterious absence of its mother, who had chosen this method of ruining a lecture that I was working up on the popular theme of "Predatory Politics," or "Plutocratic Politics," or "Predatory Plutocrats," — I wasn't quite sure which to call it. You never can be sure of anything, with a baby around. So I had just labelled it (the lecture)

that forgotten Belle Isle masterpiece! Aha, the story of his past! Just what she wanted! Whereat, down on the attic floor sits my lady, and reads and reads and reads and reads, till curfew tolls the knell of parting day. Then, gathering up the fragments, that nothing be lost, she descends and confronts me with the evidence of my guilt.

"What, every word?" I repeated.

"Every word."

"Then all is lost! When do we get the divorce?"

"Nonsense! Now, Dick, do be serious a minute, and listen to me. It must be published — just as it is! I won't have a single word altered."

"Then all is forgiven!"

"Now, Dick, do, *please*, be serious and listen. All you've got to do is to just finish it up from where you left off, and then *give it to the world!*"

Ominous and prophetic words! I condescendingly looked the thing over with the thankless patronage we bestow on our vicarious and long-suffering youth, and lo and behold! Here was something that would "give it to them" with a vengeance! Ye gods, was it possible that this fifteen-year-old philosopher, this child who was the father of my present man, had actually blundered on to the secret of the universe (up to date), the *Leit-motif* of civilization (so called), the, the — I didn't know what, exactly; but I read and read and

read and read, till at last I burst out, like Dean Swift over his "Tale of a Tub," — "Good — Gulliver, what a genius I had when I wrote that book!"

"And you were going to burn it up!" said my wife, accusingly.

"Better so, perhaps," said I, darkly. "My dear, innocent child, do you realize that there is dynamite enough in this fifteen-year-old thing to blow up the world?"

"Just what it needs!" said the innocent child.

"Woman, you know not what you propose! This comes of the Woman's Club! Would you have me let the cat out of the bag, take away the baby-rattle, disenchant Titania of her idolized ass —"

"Wouldn't I, though!" said Titania, with an I've-been-through-it-and-still-live expression.

"But, my dear, you don't understand. A disenchanted woman may live and love again; but a disenchanted world —"

"May do the same," said the President of the Woman's Club.

"I tell you," said I, dogmatically, "it will ruin Politics! — and Business! — and — and Religion, as now dispensed with!"

"So much the better!" said the lady of the manse.

I stared in amazement at this *fin de siècle* prodigy of a happy young wife and mother, sitting there in a



pretty new birthday gown, and calmly proposing the end of the world! But it was a favorite theory of mine that when woman gets tired of this garden party, she will make short work of it, as she did of that tiresome old Garden of Eden.

"But," said I, "have you reflected that they will chase us out of the garden — I should say, the parish?"

"We're used to that," said the minister's wife. "Besides, who cares, if the book makes a hundred thousand dollars?"

I reflected a moment and then spoke with the candor which is the saving grace of my character. "That last argument staggers — nay, convinces me," said I.

"Now, Dick, you know you're not a bit mercenary!"

"Not a bit! I merely see my duty clear, that's all. I owe it to the world to give it to them, and receive with meekness the one hundred thousand dollars, or whatever martyrdom they choose to inflict."

"You mean, you really *ought* to do it, no matter if we don't make a cent?"

"Precisely! You get my exact meaning! The die is cast. We will *give it to them!* — that is, if we can find a publisher who reveres the truth and despises gain; and I understand that there is practically no other kind. Only, I warn you that it will rain primeval chaos for forty days and forty nights after this



thing comes out; and what with confidence already shaken —"

"Oh, bother!" said the daughter of Eve. "I guess confidence will survive, and several other things. Now, Dick, you mind what I tell you, and just finish it up from where you left off, and we'll have the world for our parish!"

Well, the deed is done; and I sit aghast as I pen these final prefatory lines, and reflect on the cosmic cataclysm that is sure to break loose. I can see chunks of universities, church steeples, economic platitudes, and political platforms raining down out of scandalized space on the heads of stampeded millions, scurrying for their cyclone cellars! But what then? *Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan.* Shall man hesitate when woman bids him blow up the world? Better, far better, to blow up twenty worlds than be blown up yourself by the woman who has sworn to love, honor, and obey you.

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PREFACE

HAVE decided to keep careful tabs on this parish, so as to publish them and surprise the family with sudden wealth the next time Dad is out of a job, which may be any day now, as Dad has decided to turn over a new leaf and preach nothing but the truth. A fool and his parish are soon parted.

DICK NEWMAN.



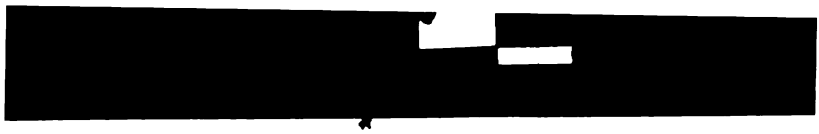
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ELDER NEWMAN, *Dick's father.*
MRS. NEWMAN, *Dick's mother.*
IYEE WOWO, *Dick's sister.*
TAD AND EMERSON, *small fry and younger brothers of Dick.*
BILL GREY, *Dick's chum.*
KITTY GOODRICH, *the prettiest girl in Belle Isle.*
HAL GOODRICH,
SAM GERRY,
ELI TEAK, AND ABOUT
SIXTEEN OTHERS, } *beaux of Iyee Wowo.*
JOHN BOWLES,
BOB LEIGHTON,
CHARLIE BARLOW,
TOMMY DODGE,
TWEENISH "DISHRAG,"
THE JENKS BOYS, AND SO ON, } *fellows at school.*
MISS GREY AND YOUNG ATWELL, *school teachers.*
ALICE DODGE,
MILDRED FENTON,
NELLIE FENTON,
ETHEL PEARSON, AND
A LOT OF OTHERS, } *pretty girls.*
CHARLIE TAGGART, *our star tragedian, in love with Alice.*
SAM LARKER, *an expert physiognomist and art connoisseur.*

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[redacted]

[redacted]



THE BELLE ISLERS

THE BELLE ISLERS

CHAPTER I

BEAUTY'S SMILE

FOR a man of my age, which was just fifteen, I was beginning to have my doubts whether I was as smart as I ought to be.

Here I was, for instance, sitting right there next door to Kitty in the seat that Bill and I had swiped two weeks ahead of time, by breaking into the old Academy through a back window and putting our books in the desk with a notice on top, warning everybody that they would be killed if they touched them; and now, what good was it doing us?

Kitty never looked over at me, nor I at her; because, if I did, and she caught me at it, she would know just why I had got the seat next to hers; and so would Irene and the other girls; and then my life wouldn't be worth living; because if your sister catches you looking at another girl, she never lets up on you till you are crazy.

And Bill was just the same with my sister, Irene — never looked at her at all! As if *she* was anything to

be scared of! And Irene wasn't a bit afraid of Bill. She looked at him about fifty times a day, in a way that *I* should call encouraging; and yet, it didn't seem to encourage Bill much.

I never saw any one so blind as Bill! If Kitty had looked at me that way, I would — well, I'd have looked back anyhow, and not sat pretending to study Cæsar, which was the very thing that Bill hated most in this world. And Irene knew it, too; so what was the use?

Bill acted as if Irene was the prettiest girl in Belle Isle, which was another proof of his blindness, because any one could see it was no such thing. Kitty Goodrich was the prettiest girl, and I saw it the minute I laid eyes on her, when our family first came to Belle Isle.

A girl with such eyes and hair, and such roses and lilies, as the poet says, and such pretty white teeth, and such a smile, like Minnehaha, Laughing Water, and so modest and *sensible*, and so on, it would be hard to find; and I knew it right away the minute I saw Kitty.

And then again, most girls have to giggle so much that you wish they would do something else for a change; but Kitty giggled so seldom that you wished she would do it some more; and such girls are scarce as hen's teeth in this world, alas!

I knew it, because we had just come from Massachusetts, where girls are thicker than flies and giggle night

and day, without stopping even for meals! Of course there are lots of pretty girls in Massachusetts (and I believe that that is what makes them giggle so; because the pretty ones always giggle the worst); and there was one of them that I thought I should never forget till I came to Belle Isle and saw Kitty, and then I saw my mistake — about the other girl, I mean.

But there was no mistake about Kitty. Even Irene, who was always hard on any girl that I looked at, told me herself, one day, that Kitty Goodrich was the nicest, prettiest girl in Belle Isle; and that she and Kitty were going to sit together next term in the back seat in the third row; and that was how Bill and I came to secure the seat that was next to them. And to make assurance doubly sure, as the poet says, we took Irene's and Kitty's books along at the same time, and put them in the right desk, so that there would be no mistake about that, either.

Well, Irene and I didn't quarrel any over her opinion of Kitty, as we did over everything else; and I knew then that I was right about Kitty; and I would have known it, anyhow, no matter what Irene said.

Irene was just sweet sixteen and a half; and had about the same number of beaux, including Hal Goodrich, Kitty's big brother, and Sam Gerry and young Eli Teak, the lawyer, and Bill Grey, my chum, and others who were always hanging around and filling up

our front parlor and inviting Irene to take a drive or go to a dance, or something — that is, all except Bill, who acted as if he didn't have the ghost of a show, when it was he that held the winning hand, if he did but know it. But was I going to tell him so? *No*, sir! If a man with trumps for his long suit and holding ace high can't hold his own against such material as Bill was up against, then I say, heaven help him, for I won't. Only sometimes I *did* want to kick Bill under the table and say, "Lead trumps, you durn fool!"

However, at the same time, I backed Bill up in every way I honorably could, considering my delicate position as Irene's brother; and when she gave me her opinion of Kitty, I gave her mine of Bill, all except his foolishness in the trump line. I told Irene that the best-looking and brainiest and all-roundest good fellow in this town was Bill Grey; and that the world would hear from him yet; and that if *I* was a girl with an eye to business, I would keep it on Bill, and not waste any of *my* valuable time on fellows with about one-tenth of his capacity.

"Hm!" says Irene, "he doesn't seem to have much spunk, nor you either! Seems to me, if I were in your place, I wouldn't be so scared every time Kitty looked at me."

And that is what a sister is good for: to reject all



THE ALL-ROUNDEST GOOD FELLOW IN TOWN.

your good advice, and give you some back that is distinctly unnecessary.

Of course Bill ought to have known better, with Irene making eyes at him the way she did; but Kitty never made an eye at me, and Irene knew it; and maybe she expected me to give myself away for nothing.

Besides, even Bill had some reason for fighting shy; because, as I told Irene, she was a born flirt, anyhow; and how could she expect any one like Bill to be encouraged when she looked at every one in the same way? Why didn't she look at Bill different, if she wanted him to be encouraged and show spunk? Or else, if spunk was all she was after, why didn't she take some of those fellows who were showing it all the time in our front parlor? As for me, I couldn't see what they were all so crazy about. Irene wasn't half as pretty as Kitty, and she was just my sister, anyhow, with dark eyes and hair, just like mine, and a tongue! O Lord! I had all I could do to hold my own with her!

Mother named her Irene, because that means peace, and she was in hopes it would strike in; but that shows all the good a name will do to a girl.

And Dad named me Richard Brinsley, in hopes that I would turn out a great orator and statesman, like Richard Brinsley Sheridan; and so Dad was always looking for signs of genius in me; but when he saw any, he always said they weren't the right kind.

Bonus was the only one of the family whose name really struck in. They named him Emerson Alcott; and the first thing he did was to swallow a dictionary and call for more; and before he was three years old, he could use language that would paralyze you; and Mother said that the name of Bonus that we had given him in derision would yet redound to his honor.

So that was the only success they had in naming us; and I told Mother that the mistake of her life was in not naming Irene Xantippe, or something of that kind; and Irene chased me clear out of the house. (Because, you understand that Xantippe, who was the wife of Socrates, was a woman with a tongue that would give you the jimjams.)

And yet, those fellows kept right on a-coming! I told Irene that *that* proved that they were fools; and she said, the biggest kind of a fool was the kind that never went where they were aching to go.

That meant me, I suppose, because I never went to see Kitty; and that shows what it means to have a sister by the name of *Peace!* Besides, I could go to Kitty's house often enough with Irene, to parties, and so on, without giving them all a chance at me.

But I suppose there *was* something about Irene that attracted them; because even the girls all seemed to like her, in spite of the extra number of beaux she had. And once there was a little Frenchman about my age

by the name of Tweenish Dishong, that we called Dishrag for short; and one day he saw Irene coming out of the house with a new dress on that I had carried back and forth about two dozen times from the dressmaker's; and Dishrag just stood and stared with all his eyes and said, "*Sacree!* what a pretty, nice girl!"

So maybe there *was* something in it, after all, when even Dishrag joined in the chorus. Anyhow, Bill thought so, though he supposed he was keeping every one in ignorance; and I suppose he felt as if he didn't deserve Irene, and so on, just as I did about Kitty! Of course, Bill was plenty good enough for Irene; and maybe I was good enough for Kitty; only if that was so, why didn't she look at me sometimes, the way she did at Bill and Charlie Barlow and the rest of them?

Kitty would smile at Bill or Charlie or any of them; and then, when *I* looked up, she would look as if there wasn't anybody around; and about the only girl in school that would smile at me was a half-witted girl by the name of Delly Dingley, and Delly's smile was a thing to scare you to death. One end of her mouth went up to her eyebrow, and the other end came down to her chin, and she would look at me with an expression that was so idiotic, that all the boys would grin, and the girls would giggle and nudge each other, and Bill would poke me and say: "Look quick, Dick!

Delly's smiling at you!" and I would get red in the face, and feel like a fool, and scowl at Delly to make her mind her business.

Bill said, we ought to pity the unfortunate.

"The unfortunate?" says I. "Yes, that's me!"

And it was; but nobody pitied me, oh, no! Irene teased me about it, and wanted to know if Delly was my style of a girl. And even Kitty would laugh, as if it pleased her nearly to death.

But laughing at you is one thing and smiling at you is another.

But of course I knew I hadn't done anything to deserve Kitty, and that I wasn't as smart as I ought to be; and how could I expect to be looked at by a girl whose father was the smartest man in town and did the biggest business, and all that?

In school I never had my Cæsar lesson, and I wasn't good in anything but Mental Arithmetic and Algebra and Geometry; and all those were dead easy. And I could play the violin some; but that was dead easy, too. And the rest of the time I was cutting up tricks to make Kitty look at me, and having to put my gum in the stove, and getting kept after school for communicating, and so on. It kept me pretty busy thinking up ways to shock Kitty; and then, if I did something, and she looked scared and disapproving, as much as to say, "*My*, but isn't he an awful boy!" I was satisfied.

Well, all that is all right, as far as it goes; but you can't expect to impress a girl much with such small potatoes; and so I knew I had got to think up something smarter, if Kitty was ever going to think I was smart enough for her.

CHAPTER II

THE BLINDNESS OF BILL

JUST to show the blindness of Bill, and how he would keep right on acting as if Irene had wings, when any one could see that she was just like other girls, I will now relate some of Irene's performances in the gum line, which will show how girls can draw the long bow with a straight face and a good conscience.

That year, the fall term at the Academy was kept by Miss Grey, Bill's sister; so that Bill *had* to behave himself, or else catch it at home, as well as in school.

It is hard on you to have your own family to deal with; and it was especially hard on Bill, because Bill and his sister were just alike; and Bill was as smart as lightning, in a quiet way. You didn't get the better of Bill much, nor of Miss Grey either; but just as you thought you had fooled her this time, you found you hadn't.

My dad, who was a great judge of the fair sex, said that Miss Grey was a woman of wit and humor and judgment and perspicacity, and so on; and I guess she was, because she could outwit Bill and me at any little game we started.



All the same, I wondered how a woman with so much perspicacity where Bill and I were concerned could be fooled so easy by a lot of girls who stood up every afternoon, and said they hadn't communicated, when Bill and I knew they had been passing notes the whole day!

But of course that wasn't communicating. Oh, no! Communicating meant whispering, the girls said; and they hadn't whispered once — only passed a bushel or so of notes back and forth; and so, on the strength of that sort of thing, they were let out half an hour before the rest of us, who were like George Washington and couldn't tell a lie. Which all goes to show what kind of virtue it is that pays in this world.

But that is how girls look at it. Girls are so constituted, or something, that they never *can* tell the truth as we do, and it's no use to expect it of them.

You never can tell what a girl means, or what she thinks of you; and all her smiles, and scowls, and other actions are nothing but blinds to cover up what she really thinks, because her mind always works just opposite to what yours does; only it never works twice alike; so that you can't tell anything by that, either.

But of course we never expected them to tell the truth as we did, because that would be impossible for a girl. If Bill or I was to start in to tell a lie, we would know we were telling it; but the more a girl lies, the more she thinks she is telling the truth! They don't

know what the truth is, anyhow; so that's what ails *them.*

And so they all stood up, and lied steadily, day after day, and never knew it; and Miss Grey let them, although she was a woman herself, and ought to have seen into their game.

Another trick of theirs was the way they had of chewing gum so as never to get caught.

The spruce gum in our town was so good that nobody could resist it, after they had once begun. And then again, girls are as crazy for gum as men are for strong drink, especially in a prohibition State; and so, as gum was prohibited in school, the girls had to have it, as well as the rest of us; only, they never had to go up and put a great wad of it in the stove. Oh, no! because they knew how to wobble it quietly around with one lovely eye on the teacher, so as never to get caught; and if the teacher should ask how many had not chewed gum to-day, they would know how to get around that too.

The gum supply in our Academy was mostly kept up by John Bowles, a big, good-natured fellow with a set of teeth that looked like snags in the river; and every once in a while he would pull a yard or so of beautiful pink and yellow gum out of his mouth, so as to make you envious and beg him for a chew. It was some trouble to break in the gum, of course; and so, as John Bowles

always had a wad of it in his cheek, the easiest way was to beg him for a chew, and then give some to any one that wanted it.

And this was where we had our revenge on the girls for the monumental whoppers they told every night, and the calm, superior way they had of looking back at us when they went out; only, we didn't intend to take any revenge on a lot of girls, you understand, and it came about by accident in this way.

The girls would have had a fit if they had known that they were chewing gum that started with John Bowles, because, they all drew the line on *him.* But we fellows hadn't any such foolish prejudices as that; because John always chewed the best gum in school; and it *looked* clean, anyhow, and tasted A1; and if the girls didn't like it, they could lump it; only that was just what they never could do; and that was where they got into trouble.

About half an hour before it was time for them to get up and tell their lies, Bill and I were sitting as good as pie at our desks, when Irene looked over at me till she caught my eye, and then dropped a note in the aisle. Then, when Miss Grey's back was turned, Bill's foot went out and scraped in the note; and this is what it said: —

"DICK, —

"Give us some gum.

"IRENE."



JOHN BOWLES.

Well, I had a good-sized wad of it in my mouth, and as I was tired of chewing it, I took the whole wad and wrapped it up in a piece of tissue paper that was around an orange in my desk. Then Bill watched his chance and slatted it over; and Irene picked it up and was just going to put it in her mouth, when she happened to think, and scowled inquiringly from me to John Bowles and back again. Of course, that meant: "Has John Bowles been chewing this gum?" I shook my head; and in about fifteen seconds, Irene and Kitty and Mildred and Alice were chewing quietly away with faces like little angels.

And then, I made a discovery. It wasn't a lie that I had told when I shook my head; but it was a mistake, just the same; because I thought I had given her the cud that I had chewed up myself, and the next minute I remembered that that cud was stuck on the underside of my desk, so that the one I gave her must have been *the one I got from John Bowles!*

Well, when I realized this mistake, I was so thunderstruck that I didn't know what to do for a minute. Then I thought maybe Bill would know; so I whispered to him, "Say, Bill, wouldn't the girls have a fit if they knew that John Bowles had had that gum in his mouth for the last two hours?"

And then Bill and I nearly had a fit ourselves, it was such a good one on the girls! "But don't tell

'em," says Bill; "because if you do, it'll kill 'em, sure!"

So we concluded to let them live, and enjoy it all by ourselves; only, we were enjoying it so hard that we got careless with our gum; and the first we knew, Miss Grey had us spotted.

"Willy and Dick," says she, "are you chewing gum?"

"Yes'm," says we together.

"And you were both communicating, were you not?"

"Yes'm."

"Very well, you may both put your gum in the stove and stay half an hour after school."

Bill tipped me a wink, as we marched down to the stove; and then he opened the stove door and hunted around in his cheek after the gum, as if he had mislaid it in there somewhere, while I was chewing away for dear life, as if it was my last chance on earth. "Boys," says Miss Grey, "if there is any further nonsense, you will both remain an hour, instead of a half hour."

That settled *us:* so we chucked our gum in on the waste paper where we could get it again if we wanted it, and went back to our seats, with the girls looking at us all the way, as meek and lovely as Mary's little lamb. To look at them, you'd think they despised gum worse than strong drink, and pitied any one that got caught a-chewing it.

"As it is now half-past three," says Miss Grey, "I

will dismiss all those who have not communicated to-day. All who have not done so may rise."

Then all the girls rose to a man, and the boys all kept their seats as usual, and nudged each other in the ribs,



ALL THE GIRLS ROSE TO A MAN.

while the girls received the reward of their virtue and marched out like a procession of saints.

And there our desks were, full of the notes that they had passed us about gum, and so on! But that wasn't

communicating — oh, no! It was just the kind of successful virtue that girls understand, and which gives them a right to crow over you!

And so Bill and I stayed and suffered along till our time was up, and all for telling the truth! But Bill says, if you will be fool enough to tell the truth, you must expect to suffer; and I suppose you must. It's only girls that don't have to pay for telling the truth, or lies, either. Oh, no! girls don't pay for their lies any more than they do for their ice-cream.

Now the point to this is that Irene was just like other girls; and yet Bill kept right on acting as if she had wings.



CHAPTER III

APPLES

WELL, the half-hour was up at last, and Bill and I got off with nothing worse than some good advice to behave more like girls in the future.

"Girls!" says Bill, when we were out on the platform. "Just as if there weren't liars enough in this town already, without inviting us to join the procession."

"That's so, Bill," says I; "and I guess if Dad knew how Irene was behaving, he'd have something to say about it."

"What's the use of picking *her* out?" says Bill. "Look at Kitty Goodrich! If my family was as pious as hers is —"

"Well now, Bill," says I, "how do we know that Kitty passed any notes? We didn't see her pass any, did we? No, sir; but we saw Irene pass about a bushel!"

"Oh, well, girls will be girls," says Bill, "and it's no use being too hard on them, because they were born so."

Well, I saw it was no use to talk, because Bill would never hear a word against Irene. A queer thing about Bill was that though he knew just how Irene could behave, it never seemed to make any difference with him; and I believe he was just as anxious to do something to deserve her as I was to deserve Kitty! But Bill was probably the blindest fellow that ever lived.

"Bill," says I, "let's *do* something!"

"All right," says Bill. "What'll we do?"

We both thought hard for a minute, and then Bill had it.

"Say!" says he, "I'll bet five cents that old Bugbee's apples are ripe!"

Now apples were scarce in our town; and so, they were nearly as good as money. They were good to eat and good to swap, and good to give to the girls, who liked them better than gum; so that you were sure to stand well with them and every one else, as long as the apples lasted. And it was ten to one that when you stood eating an apple, somebody would stand by and say, "Gimme the core of that apple when you are done with it?" And the more core you left, the more generous you were considered to be.

The first time I was asked for an apple core, I was thunderstruck (because I had just come from Massachusetts, where apples rotted in heaps on the ground while they were waiting to be turned into cider); and

when I handed over about half of the apple, it made them think I was too generous to succeed in life.

So that was what it meant to have apples in Belle Isle; and when Bill mentioned old Bugbee's orchard, I saw his game in a minute.

"Let's try 'em to-night!" says I.

"How'll you get away?" says Bill.

"Oh, I'll fix that all right," says I, in an easy, confident way (because Bill was two years older than I; and so, in order to stand well with him, and be worthy of his friendship, I knew I had got to show myself a man).

"What say we get our Cæsar out together?" says I, with a wink at Bill.

"Meet me at Gerry's board pile, and I'll bring the trot, and we'll do it in five minutes, and then get down to business," says Bill; and the thing was as good as done.

That night at the supper table, Dad looked at me sternly, and said, "Where were you at half-past four, to help put in that wood?"

"He and Will got kept after school, as usual," says Irene, sarcastically. But I got back at her and said: —

"Well, anyhow, we didn't get up and lie like pickpockets, and say we hadn't communicated, when we'd been passing notes all day, like you and Mildred and the rest of them." (Somehow, I couldn't say, "You

and Kitty," because, how did I know that Kitty had passed any notes?)

"Communicating is whispering," says Irene, in a calm, superior tone, such as girls try on with their younger brother; "and we didn't any of us girls whisper *once*."

"Oh, no, girls don't whisper! They just lift their eyebrows and shake their heads and wag their fingers and write a bushel of notes and get us into trouble and then crow over us! I like girls a big lot, I do!"

"Yes, you like Kitty pretty well."

"I don't either!" says I. (Because there are some things that are nobody's business but yours; and if people poke at you about them, you have a right to give them an evasive answer.)

"Oh! Then it's Mattie Crump, I suppose!" says Irene.

"Mattie Crump! I hate her! — sassy impudent thing!"

"Then it's Delly Dingley!" says Irene. "Oh, Mother, you ought to see Delly smiling at Dick!"

Then the whole family snickered; and I got so mad that I thought of that mistake about the gum; and was glad I had made it, because now I could get back at Irene.

"And who do you like?" says I. "John Bowles! Ha, ha! He's a nice one for Irene, John is!"



"That horrid thing?" shrieks Irene, looking sick at the stomach. "Ugh! Mother, make him stop!"

"Well, you like his gum well enough, anyhow."

"His gum! Oh, Mother! Think of me chewing gum after John Bowles!"

"Well," says I, "that's what you did, anyhow! Ha! Guess where that gum came from that you chewed? — *John Bowles!*"

Well, Irene was so flabbergasted that words failed her, at first, and all she could do was to stare at me in speechless horror. "What! *that creature actually had it in his mouth? You told me he hadn't!*"

"Didn't neither! I just shook my head!"

"You knew what I meant! Oh, Mother, it fairly turns my stomach!"

And then Irene got up from the table and went and scrubbed out her mouth with soap and a tooth-brush, and came back with tears in her eyes; and pointing at me, she says: —

"He's spoiled my supper, that horrid, horrid boy! I'll *never* forgive him, never, never, never! And I'll tell Kitty about the trick he played on her; and then she'll hate him, too! and then he'll see how smart he was!"

"That's right, run and tell, tattle-tale! Besides, it was all a mistake, anyhow. I thought I was giving you the right cud; and instead of that, it was the one I got

from John Bowles. But you won't tell *that* to Kitty — oh, no!"

"No, I won't, because I know it's a *lie!* You *meant* to give me that horrid disgusting gum out of his mouth, and then laugh and crow about it! And Father just sits there and laughs, too, when he knows that Dick ought to be whipped!"

"Well, now, I don't know," says Dad, trying to straighten out his face. "Dick says it was a mistake. Besides, girls shouldn't take gum out of other people's mouths."

"But, Father," says Irene, "I don't mind Dick's mouth, because he has nice teeth; but that John Bowles! — Oh, if you could see his teeth!"

"And suppose she should catch some disease!" puts in Mother. "Irene, if you *must* chew gum, why *can't* you chew it up yourself?"

"Because it sticks to your teeth, and Dick knew that I relied on him to chew it up for me, and I think he ought to be whipped for playing me such a base, detestable trick! Father, *can't* he be whipped? I wish you would give it to him, good!"

"Well, now, wait a minute," says Dad. "Before we do any whipping, let's investigate a little. How about this communicating that Dick speaks about? Is it true, as he says, that you girls pass notes and then get out early for not communicating?"

"Passing notes is not communicating!" says Irene. "It's only whispering that is communicating."

"Not according to Webster," says Dad. "You can communicate in a dozen ways besides whispering; and passing notes is one of them; didn't you know that?"

"No, I didn't," says Irene.

"Well, now that you know it," says Dad, "I don't want to hear of a daughter of mine passing any more notes, and then getting out early for not communicating, because," says Dad, "it shows a lack of acquaintance with the dictionary."

"Yes, or the Bible," says I.

"Come, come," says Dad, "don't get too smart, my little sonny; or I may have to 'tend to your case after all; and don't make any more mistakes with John Bowles's gum, or you *may* wish you hadn't," says he.

Well, anyhow, I was glad to see Dad side with me a little for once, and give Irene some information that she needed out of the dictionary; and maybe now she would be able to tell the truth, if she wanted to. But you could see that she wasn't satisfied, just the same, and wished she hadn't got the information; because girls do so hate to give up the dodges they invent to get round the truth.

Still, as Bill said, it's no use to be hard on a girl; so I went in to the front room, where Irene was playing on the organ, and offered to play with her on the

violin; but she turned on me like the heroine in a play down at the hall, with flashing eyes and so on, and said: "You needn't think," says she, "that I'll forgive you as easy as all that! No, nor Kitty either! Oh, you wait till I tell *her* and you'll see!"

So that was all the good it did! You can be as easy on a girl as you please, but she won't be easy on you — oh, no! — especially if she is your sister!

Well, as Dad had been so easy on me, for once, I thought it was a good time to take him while he was good-natured; so I opened the hall door and said to him: —

"Say, Dad, I'm going over to Bill's to get a Latin lesson."

"Yes," says Irene, witheringly, whopping round on the organ stool. "To get it out with Will's translation."

And that's the way that girls return good for evil, as they are taught to do in church.

"Who said he had any translation?" says I.

"Nobody; but I believe he has, by the way he translates."

"That's right," says I, "slander a man when you don't know anything about it! Maybe that's why you and Mildred and Alice always get out *your* Latin together; because you have a translation."

"No, we haven't either, and you know it."



"Well, anyhow, you always translate it for them; and Dad translates it for you; and that's worse than a trot!"

"There, there," says Dad, "that'll do for this time. Run along, Dick, and get your Cæsar, if you want to. I guess Willy hasn't any translation."

I gave Irene a look that she understood, and skipped out of the front door with my Cæsar, before Dad had time to change his mind.

CHAPTER IV

GREAT CÆSAR!

OF course I *had* to take my Cæsar along, because Bill and I were not the men to lie like pickpockets about every little thing. *No*, sir! We intended to get that Latin out at Gerry's board pile before proceeding to business. It would only take about five minutes, anyhow; and then, our consciences would be clear.

Well, Gerry's board pile was situated about halfway between our house and Bill's, and just across the road from the Gerry place. There were stacks and stacks of boards, about ten feet high, and with room between the piles to crawl in till you got to the middle; and in there was the snuggest kind of a place, about three or four feet wide and ten or twelve feet long, where Bill and I used to go to talk over schemes, or stow away anything that we wanted to keep safe.

Bill was there all right, when I crawled in, smoking his pipe and laying out the plan of battle; only, I couldn't seem to see anything of Bohn's translation of Cæsar.

"Where's the trot?" says I.

Bill jumped up and slapped his side pockets and stared at me.

"Forgot it!" says he.

"Who cares?" says I. "Now I can tell Irene that we didn't have any translation, anyhow; and we'll get it out the last fifteen minutes before recitation!"

"Good idea!" says Bill. "Hurrah for Bohn!"

We gave three quiet cheers for that great and good man; and then, as the moon was under the clouds, or somewhere, and everything looked about right, we started for old Bugbee's orchard.



Into Gerry's Board Pile.

It was just as Bill had surmised. The apples were just right for picking; and those that weren't quite ripe would be all the better to stow away; so that about nine o'clock that night, if anybody had been watching, they would have seen Bill and me crawling back into Gerry's board pile with our

clothes sticking out so that we could hardly get through, and unload a bushel or so of first-class Duchess apples, which we stowed under the boards, and which would make their mouths water the next day.

"There!" says Bill, "I guess the girls will treat us about right as long as those hold out; and after that, we know where there are more of them."

So everything went like clockwork till I got home, and then Dad began to investigate a little, as he called it.

"Well, got your Cæsar lesson?" says he, the minute I came through the sitting-room door.

"I don't know; some of it was pretty hard," says I, in a worn and weary tone. (And that was true; because the whole of Cæsar is as hard as he could make it.)

"Pooh!" says Irene. "That was the easiest lesson we've had this Fall! I don't believe they looked at it. *I* believe they've been up to some mischief. Dick looks just as if he'd been stealing apples, or something."

"You shut up, Iyee Wowo," says I. (That was the name that Irene gave herself when she was just beginning to talk, which was before she was out of her cradle; and the nearest she could come to Irene Aurora was Iyee Wowo; and so I always called her that when she acted like a baby.) "You think you are pretty smart in Latin," says I; "but when it comes to

Mathematics, you're mighty glad to get help from me and Bill."

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad. "Boys ought to be good in Latin, too, seems to me, and not get beaten by girls. Let me see the place where you and Willy had the difficulty."

"There!" says I, opening the book and pouncing on the meanest-looking place in sight. "*That* thing! What did old Cæsar want to write that for, anyhow?"

"*That!*" says Irene. "Pooh, that's the easiest place of all. 'But the remaining multitude of children and women — for with all theirs they had departed from home and had crossed the Rhine — began to flee in all directions; for pursuing whom Cæsar sent cavalry.'"

"Darn his ugly, measly skin!" says I, slamming down the book. "To send a lot of ugly sons of pickpockets on horseback to run down a lot of women and children and murder 'em in cold blood! That's the kind of thing we have to study in school!"

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad, looking as if the classics had got a black eye. "The Romans were a great people," says he —

"Yes, they were, a *great* lot!" says I. "A great lot of pirates and pickpockets and scalawags! And Dad here, he preaches every Sunday about the Golden Rule and honesty and so on, and then stands up for this kind of thing, and wants us to study it!"



"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad. "I want you to study it for intellectual development, which is just what you need. The Golden Rule has nothing to do with it."

"No, I should say not!" says I. "If I was a man, I wouldn't let my son study such stuff — teaching him to *steal* and *lie*, and kill women and children, and all that!"

"Well," says Mother, anxiously, "I believe Dick is partly right. Who knows what the effect may be of setting up such examples for children to follow?"

"Nonsense, it's intellectual development," says Dad. "As for stealing and so forth, Dick knows very well that if I caught him doing anything of the kind —"

"Yes, Dad, I know what you would do to *me;* but if it was Cæsar, you'd say he was a great and good man! I don't think much of education, anyhow."

"Of course you don't!" says Irene, witheringly; "because *you haven't got your lesson!* I can see through you, if Father can't."

"Well, how about Algebra, Miss Iyee Wowo? Who's got that lesson, you or me? But there's nothing about robbery and murder in Algebra, and so I suppose it don't contribute to our intellectual development, like Cæsar! I'm going to bed, I'm tired of Cæsar, and I need rest, as Bonus says."

(Bonus was the name that Emerson Alcott, my youngest brother, went by, because Mother said he

was such a *good* boy. And so I used my intellectual development on him and called him Bonus; and then he and Mother objected, because it was Latin, I suppose.) Well, Bonus set up a prompt howl, and said: —



Bonus.

"Mother," says he, virtuously, "is it permissible for Dick to call me by such a designation as Bonus, when my name is Emerson Alcott?" (That was Bonus's style. The longest words in the dictionary were none too good for him.)

"No, Emerson, my child," says Mother, soothingly. "They shall not call you Bonus, or anything but your proper name. Father, don't you think that Dick ought to be corrected for persecuting his little brother?"

"Certainly!" says I, "of course! Dick ought to be licked for calling Emerson, Bonus; but nobody ought to be licked for calling Dick, Dick, when his real name is Richard Brinsley, — oh, no!"

"Dick, you may go to bed!" says Dad, severely. "I guess you *do* need rest, as Emerson puts it."

"Oh, don't let him go yet! I wanted him to help me with that horrid Algebra!" says Irene, pleadingly.

"No, you don't, Iyee Wowo!" says I. "If you're

so awful smart, you can get it out yourself, — you and Kitty and *Mil-dred!*"

"Now, Dick, *please!*"

"No, sir, I don't. You stay up and study Cæsar, the rest of you, and learn how to lie and steal, and — and chew gum out of John Bowles's mouth!" says I, skipping off to bed.

"Horrid thing! I'm glad he's gone!" says Irene; and so was I, because it was a narrow escape for me on that Cæsar business. Great Cæsar, what if Dad had found out I hadn't looked at it, and then gone on investigating!

Well, Tad had gone to bed already, and I was just dropping off to sleep alongside of him, when up comes Dad from downstairs and looks in at our door and says: —

"Ahem," says he, "I was just going to say, Dick, that perhaps, in some respects, Cæsar was more of a warning than an example, you understand. And that is how we get our intellectual as well as our moral development," says Dad; "by warnings as well as examples. That was all, Dick. Good night."

Well, that was a good one! There I was congratulating myself on getting off so cheap, and there was Dad coming to own up that I had got in under his skin with what I said about Cæsar, when all I was trying to do was to head off the investigation!

But come to think of it, there *was* considerable truth in what I said about old Julius. What had he done all his life but make people miserable? And as if that wasn't enough, he had to write it all down on paper so that more people would have to translate it for ever and ever!

Well, I always had my suspicions of Cæsar from the very start; because, if he was all right, why had he sat up nights to write about himself in a mean and unnecessary foreign language that he knew would have to be translated for ever and ever, amen? When a man begins like that, you can always be sure there are other things he will do; and sure enough, the book was full of them! — lying and stealing and murdering and enslaving and every such thing that he could think up; and that was why they called him Great Cæsar, I suppose!

Great pirates, if Bill and I should do nothing all our lives but steal apples, and murder old Bugbee's whole family in order to get them, and then write a book about it for people to translate for ever and ever, I suppose they'd call us "Great William and Great Dick!"

CHAPTER V

SNAPPING THE CRACK

BILL said the successful could afford to be generous, and that we always ought to devote a fair share of our honest gains to benevolent purposes. And so, when Kitty and Irene and Mildred and Alice came along the next morning and said, "O-o-o-o!" to the apples we were eating, we shelled out as liberally as Cæsar when he came home with all Gaul in his pocket; and if the girls smiled on him the way they did on us, he must have felt rewarded for his labors.



WE SHELLED OUT.

It was just as Bill had prophesied, and we found ourselves popular as long as the apples lasted;

and they lasted quite a while; because, as Bill said, it was no use to be unpopular when we knew where to get the apples.

Great Cæsar, but we were generous with our wealth, and it was pleasant to feel that you were doing a little good, and making everybody happy! So we paid up our debts to John Bowles in the gum line, and fixed Tad and Bonus with a few first-class ones, so that they wouldn't get us into trouble at home, and handed down no end of apple cores, with plenty of apple on them, to no end of small fry who were grateful to us.

And every one took the apples and asked no questions, which would have been ungrateful and mean of them, anyhow, to say nothing of the fact that very few were in a situation to do so. As long as you had apples and were free with them, it was nobody's business where they came from. That was the way *we* looked at it, and you would as soon think of asking John Bowles about every yard of gum he pulled out of his mouth, as to ask about every apple that was offered to you, and whose orchard it came from.

Of course the apples made some trouble for us in school, the girls kept bothering us so with notes like this: —

"WILL, —

"Give me one. The first one is gone.

"KITTY."

and —

"DICK, —

"Give me another, like a dear brother.

"IRENE."

I thought, at least, that Irene might have written to Bill and Kitty to me; but that is not the way that woman disposes, as the poet says; and Bill and I were willing to sacrifice ourselves as long as we had an apple left, and let virtue be its own reward, and run the risk of getting caught at it.

So that, after a while, you could see about half of the school munching away on the quiet, behind their geographies and Cæsars and so on. Bill said it was safer for us, when there were so many others to be watched; and so I suppose he got careless; and suddenly Miss Grey spoke up and said: —

"Will, what are you doing?"

"Getting out a proposition in Geometry," says Bill (which was true).

"But you look as if you were eating something. Are you?" says Miss Grey.

"No'm," says Bill (and that was true, too; because he had just swallowed the last mouthful).

And yet, Miss Grey wasn't satisfied; but kept an eye on Bill and me so that we had to study for quite a while, and lost a good deal of time.

But we noticed she was just as satisfied with the girls as ever; and that night when the call came for all the saints to stand up and be counted, and Kitty and Irene kept their seats, Miss Grey was thunderstruck, and said: "I would like to know," says she, "how it happens that two of my best girls have communicated to-day?"

"Because," says Kitty, coloring up, "we've been passing notes."

"And Father says, *that* is communicating," says Irene, looking sweet and saintly.

"I am sorry," says Miss Grey, "but your father is quite right; and hereafter we will have it understood that passing notes is communicating."

Then Mildred and Alice and half of the girls sat down looking foolish; and the rest went out looking virtuous; and after that, there were less of them to crow over us.

So we did *some* good after all with those apples; and about noon the next day, we had another great idea. It's all well enough to be generous to a certain extent, but after that, you must look out; because, as the last lecturer said to us at Goodrich Hall, we should always use our last success as a jimmy to open another bank with, or words to that effect.

So Bill and I began to go slow with our apples, so as to run up the demand for them and make the boys

offer us bargains in gum, and so on, till at last, all at once, we saw our chance.

A game of Snap-the-crack was going on that noon in the boys' entry, and Bill and I decided to work the



SNAP-THE-CRACK

jimmy racket as that great man, the lecturer, had advised us to.

Now, as apples worse than ours were selling at a cent apiece at old Fitzpatrick's store, we claimed to



come in with ours at the market price, and they allowed the claim.

You didn't need any practice to play Snap-the-crack. All you needed was to toss your copper to the ceiling and watch where it fell; and the copper that fell nearest to a crack in the floor was the one that bagged the whole outfit.

So Bill and I swapped a few of our apples for the coin, and came into the game on even terms with John Bowles and Bob Leighton and the Jenks boys and Charlie Barlow and Tommy Dodge and one or two others.

In about five minutes John Bowles was out of the game, busted; and then Charlie Barlow, and then the Jenks boys; and then Tommy Dodge and Bill dropped out, one after another, till at last it lay between Bob Leighton and me.

Bob had started in with a ten-cent piece that he was going to use to buy cocoanut cakes at old Fitzpatrick's; only, he thought he could double his money and buy twice as many; and that was where he missed it. One after another, I scooped in his coppers (because I seemed to have got the hang of making them fall on the crack every time), till Bob was reduced to nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, *One!*

And there Bob stood with his last cent in his hand and looking at it with a queer kind of a smile on that

red, freckled face of his. "Well, here she goes," says he, and tossed it up! It fell alongside of mine, and mine had won!

It was the proudest moment of my life when I stood there with every last cent that the boys had in my pockets, to say nothing of the gum and so on, that they had put up for cash; and I felt like Cæsar after he came and saw and conquered, especially as I had always had to bear up under the ignominy of being a minister's son, which was supposed to incapacitate you for business. But now *that* superstition was busted by the hard facts; and the boys had to own up that they were wrong. And I must say that, now that they realized their mistake, they respected me as never before.

"Dick's a lucky cuss!" says John Bowles, admiringly, who had lost even the gum out of his mouth. "He'll be a great man one of these days. Say, Dick," says he, "lend us a chew of gum, will you, and tell us how you worked it on us?"

"Oh, it's just luck," says I, carelessly, handing over the chew.

"Luck!" says Tommy Dodge, who was sore over the six cents he had lost. "Yes, that's all it is; and I'll bet you he dasn't try it again."

"Have you got any more money?" says I, turning on him and jingling a pocketful of it.

"No, I ain't," says Tommy, backing down; "but if I had, I'd try it with you."

"Oh, that's all right. I'll lend you some," says I.

"No," says Tommy, edging away. "I ain't going to get into debt."

"Humph!" says Bill. "If a man gets beat, he'd better shut up!" And the crowd all said the same.

"Not at all!" says I, politely. "Any one that wants to try it again, now is his time."

But no one wanted to take me up, except Tommy, and he didn't dare.

Well, I ought to have felt satisfied, because the game was all right and the play had been square; and nobody denied that I had come honestly by every cent I had in my pocket; but there were all the fellows looking as poor as pickpockets; and there was Bob Leighton, especially, trying to keep up a cheerful grin, but looking pretty sick under his freckles. I didn't pity the others much; because Bill hadn't staked anything but apples; and the rest of them got their money easy enough, driving cows, and so on; but Bob's case was different, because he *had* to drive cows for nothing on his father's farm; and every one knew that it wasn't once in a dog's age that his father gave him ten cents to spend; and Bob had intended to revel in cocoanut cakes; and now his cake was dough. Of course, if Bob had won ten cents from me, he would have

grinned broader than ever, as farmers always do when they get the best of you; but not being a farmer myself, I was sorry for Bob; and the next minute I had an idea.

"Come on, boys," says I, "I'm going to treat!"

Well, if you had heard the yell that went up to the roof of the old Academy building and scared the pigeons out of the belfry, you would have thought you were at a political convention, *sure.* And the next minute, the boys fell in behind me, or raced on ahead, and we all started for down street.

CHAPTER VI

OLD FITZ'S STORE

TRYING hard to look as modest as possible, but feeling that I was doing a noble deed, I led the crowd into old Fitz's store and told them to name their stuff.

A tougher-looking place than old Fitz's, inside and out, it would be hard to find. It was a tottering old ruin of a shebang as black as your hat, nearly, with nothing in it but a long counter on one side with a litter of wormy apples and peanuts on top, and some dirty old shelves back of it, lumbered up with empty cigar boxes and glass cans covered with fly-specks and with nothing in them to speak of, except, maybe, a little striped candy and a few jaw-breakers and some cocoanut-cakes that old Fitz had had on hand for seven generations.

That was old Fitz's stock in trade. Anyhow, that was all there was *in sight;* and just why we went there was a puzzler, unless, maybe, because it was the first store on Main Street at the foot of Academy Hill, and you naturally went in there as you went by; and because old Fitz gave us good bargains, considering that anything you bought of him would be dear at any price.



LOOKING VERY MUCH REFRESHED.

And yet, somehow, no store in Belle Isle was so popular with certain ones as old Fitz's. People went in there looking very thirsty and came out looking very much refreshed; and so, the temperance people argued that old Fitz sold rum.

Well, maybe he did, though Dave Nickerson said at a trial that he couldn't swear to it, as he never knew just what to call it; and he guessed a Medford manufacturer wouldn't recognize the article. Maybe it was rum and maybe it was benzine, Dave said. So they failed to convict old Fitz *that* time.

All the same, nobody could deny that old Fitz did a lot of good in town by always being on hand to get arrested whenever people became virtuous all of a sudden, and wanted some one to vindicate the law on. And sure enough, there was old Fitz, always waiting and ready to be hauled up for the last pint of benzine he had sold! So you see, if it hadn't been for him, you never would have known there was any such thing as virtue in Belle Isle.

And once Dad preached a sermon from the text, "And the goat shall bear upon him all their infirmities into a land not inhabited." And every one knew he meant old Fitz. And the sermon was published in the "Star"; and Dave Nickerson read it and said it was true, every blank word of it! "Old Fitz is the scapegoat of this whole blank town," says Dave; "and *I*



say us virtuous people ought to git up a testimonial, or something, and present it to him with appropriate remarks."

Well, Dave was in there that day, looking as big and fat and jolly and don't-care-a-blank as usual, with his game eye cocked up towards heaven; and Elik Easy was in there with him; and the two of them looked as if they'd just been having some of the benzine; and old Fitz stood there, as long and solemn as an undertaker, with one thumb in the armhole of his vest, and looking as if he was doing a legitimate business in stale peanuts and so on.

"Well, boys, what'll you take?" says I to the crowd.

"Going to set 'em up?" says Dave, with a wink at old Fitz, who looked like a tombstone on duty. "All right," says Dave, "gimme whiskey straight. Say, Dick," says he, "ain't going to get full, are you? Cause, if you do, they'll say you learned it of me."

Of course this referred to the fact that as Dave was my violin teacher, the temperance ladies had warned Dad against the influence of such an example on me; but Dad said he'd risk it, as Dave hadn't offered to treat me yet; and as for swearing, Dad said you could hear that 'most anywhere; and, besides, Dave never swore to hurt anything while he gave me lessons, which showed that he had more moral sense than half of them.

When we first came to town, Dave used to make a point of driving past our house at a two-forty gait, and swearing a blue streak all the way, which was said to be his usual plan with new ministers; and I suppose he expected that after that Dad would give him a wide berth, the way the most of them did; but when Dad shook hands with him on the street and addressed him like a leading citizen and asked him to give me lessons on the violin, Dave was discouraged, and almost forgot to swear going by our house; and only used a few of his little ones before me, such as you could hear in most of the churches; and some complained because you didn't hear them in ours.



AT A TWO-FORTY GAIT.

So Dave and I understood each other, and I just laughed at his joke about setting 'em up, and said to old Fitz: "Give me a pint of peanuts and a half a pound of gum-drops and ten cents' worth of cocoanut-cakes."

"Jiminy!" says Bob Leighton. "He's going to blow it all in!"

But I wasn't, though, because you don't have to go that far to make yourself popular. Just blow in what you can spare, and people will respect you more than they would if you hadn't cleaned them out. So Bob got his cocoanut-cakes and peanuts and candy, besides; and the rest came in for their share, and every one was satisfied and said I was a bang-up fellow, and so on.

"Where'd Dick get so much money?" says Dave, looking on.

"Snapping the crack. Cleaned us all out," says John Bowles.

"That so?" says Dave. "Well, you boys are beginning young; Dick'll be a financier one o' these days. Used to be one myself," says he; "but they cleaned *me* out in no time; and they didn't set 'em up afterwards, either, the way Dick did. Oh, there's some slick ones in this town, and they'll get your last cent, if you don't look out; and then they won't have no time for you. Well, I was a great man, as long's the money lasted. Me and Deacon Goodrich used to be leaders of society in them days, and it was Dave this and Mr. Nickerson that; but now it's nothin' but swearin' old Dave Nickerson; and every time he takes a drink, the whole town hears about it, and you'd think none o' the rest of them ever touched a drop!" says Dave.

"Well, anyhow," says he, "they can't say I didn't play a square game as long as it lasted, or put on any

airs, or set myself up above the rest of 'em. Anybody was just as good as me in them days; and now that I'm cleaned out, damned if I ain't as good as anybody," says he. "Well, come on, Elik, let's go up street and see what they got on tap at Tub Wilkins's hotel."

Of course this wasn't the first time we had heard the story of Dave's fallen grandeur; but no matter how often you heard it, you were always interested, because Dave always threw in some fresh light on human nature; and you saw that it was something to have been a great man, anyhow; and it encouraged you in the ambition to always come out at the top of the heap, and then nobody would care what you did.

Well, I followed Dave's advice by reserving the balance of my winnings for a rainy day; and when I got home, I had enough peanuts left to stand well with Irene.

"Peanuts?" says she. "Give me some, Dick; that's a good brother!"

Well, the good brother shelled out liberally, and then the good sister began to ask questions while she was munching the peanuts.

"Where'd you get them?" says she.

"Bought 'em, of course. Where'd you suppose?"

"Where did you get the money?"

"Apples," says I. "If you have apples, you can get money for 'em, can't you?"

"Where'd you get the apples, then?"

"Look here, Iyee Wowo," says I, "seems to me you're getting pretty particular all of a sudden, as soon as you get your share. If you don't want those peanuts, I can eat 'em myself."

There was no getting around that argument, except by giving back the peanuts, which was something that didn't occur to Irene. So she simply kept mum and ate the peanuts and looked as if she had an idea, but would say nothing about it *this* time.

Well, let her look. You will notice a lot of people looking that way while they are swallowing down your plunder; but you never see any of them refusing it, — oh, no!

I was thinking about this that night at the supper table, and feeling as good as anybody, when Dad looked over at me and said:—

"What's Dick looking so big about?"

"Oh, *Dick!*" says Irene, witheringly. "He thinks he's smart."

I scorned to reply to this. Think I was smart! I *knew* I was.

Then Emerson spoke up and gave the whole thing away, as usual. "*I* know!" says he, excitedly. "Dick made a lot of money after school!" says he.

"Ah, how so?" says Dad.

"Snapping the crack," says Emerson. "John Bowles said Dick cleaned out the whole crowd."

Now maybe Emerson was admiring my performance, but I wasn't admiring his much; so I looked at him in a way he understood; and Dad looked at me in a way I understood, and said, "Aha!" says he. "So you've been *gambling*, have you?"

"No, I ain't," says I. "Just been snapping the crack."

"Well, what's that but gambling? Don't you know any better than that? Gambling!" says Dad. "Do you want to turn out nothing but a low, good-for-nothing gambler like Elik Easy? If you want money, why don't you get a job and earn some, instead of getting other people's money away from them for nothing?"

"Well, I treated the crowd, didn't I? Yes, sir! And they as good as got it all back again, except a little that was mine by rights. I had a right to *some* of it, didn't I?"

"No, sir! Not a cent of it! Money made by gambling is as good as stolen, and I don't want to hear of anything of the kind again, or I'll settle with you in a way you won't like."

Bonus looked good and sweet and satisfied; and I resolved to settle with him, anyhow. And as for what Dad said, I was disgusted to think of his taking such ground, when I knew that nobody in Belle Isle but me was expected to take it.

"Well, then," says I, "what about your old church

fair, and the grab-bag, and the bean-bottle, and the guess-cake, and the fish-pond, and the mystery-table, and all that?"

"Sure enough!" says Mother. "What *are* we to do about such things?"

"Oh, keep 'em up, of course," says I; "and make all you can out of 'em; and then come home and blow up Dick for doing the same thing."

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad, screwing up his face, the way he did when the corn was on him. "A church fair is a different thing. The motive at least is good, though the methods employed may be — ahem! — open to objections. Nobody at the fair wants to do anything but help the church along," says Dad, screwing up his courage; "whereas *you*," says he, "were simply trying to get other people's money for nothing. Besides," says Dad, hastily, just as I was going to put in, "we are thinking of — ahem — of discontinuing the grab-bag and so on. Furthermore, if gambling isn't right at a church fair, it isn't right for you, either."

"Then what makes you walk around and smile at them down at the fair and then come home and blow me up sky high? Why don't you come down on them as heavy as you do on me?"

"Look here," says Dad, severely. "Your language is not what it ought to be for a boy of your age. Your grammar is careless and defective, and your tone is not

proper from a fifteen-year-old son to his father. Now I don't want to hear any more about this till after supper; and I don't want to hear of any more gambling in this family, church fair or no church fair!"

Well, that is what some people call argument. If they find you are getting the best of them, they will begin to talk about *language and grammar* and *respecting your superiors;* and if that don't work, they'll shut you up by threatening to lick you! I knew that Dad was just working to gain time; and sure enough, after supper, he called me up to his study to straighten out the kinks in his argument.

"Ahem!" says he, to begin with. "About church fairs, now, I have made up my mind that reform is necessary. Of course, we know that the people mean well enough, and therefore we must not needlessly hurt their feelings."

"Well, then, how about my feelings?" says I. "Didn't I mean all right, too? And didn't I treat the crowd on peanuts and candy and cocoanut-cakes?"

"No doubt, no doubt!" says Dad; "but that doesn't make gambling all right. No, sir, and never will. An institution like a church fair is not so easily remedied; but we can at least keep our own hands clean —"

"I don't see how we can, if we all pitch in and help it along," says I.

"Leave that to me," says Dad; "I'll reform the

church-fair business in due time; and meanwhile, I propose to reform you, anyhow, — yes, sir, if I have to take a stick to do it with!" says Dad, grimly. "So remember. No more gambling from now on, or there will be trouble."

Well, I couldn't see the sense of lugging in the stick every three minutes to reënforce your argument, especially coming from a man like Dad, who advocated the Golden Rule every Sunday; and I resolved to argue it out with him, as soon as I was big enough; and you will notice that by *that* time people are willing to drop the stick argument and listen to reason.

Well, as I was plenty big enough to argue with Emerson, I decided to show him the error of his ways. So, watching my chance, I caught him out back of the woodpile and came down on him like the wolf on the fold, as the poet says. Emerson saw me coming, and setting his back against the woodpile, he prepared to die hard, the way they do in books. "This rock shall fly from its firm base as soon as I," says he.

It was a gallant spectacle, and for the moment I was minded to spare him; but my heart was adamant, and his hour was come. But just as I was about to pulverize him, an idea occurred to me and stayed my hand. If I mauled him as he deserved, Dad would be attracted by his howls and give it to me with compound interest; whereas, by offering him his life in exchange

for mumness, I could secure my future deals from betrayal, so long as the fear of death was before his eyes. So I put on a relenting look, and said, "Emerson, my son," says I, "do you like peanuts?"

"I could eat some, if I had 'em," says he.

"Well, then," says I, "if I spare your life and throw in a handful of peanuts, will you solemnly swear to keep mum about your brother Dick, his deals and designs forever, so help you Beelzebub?"



"WILL YOU SWEAR TO KEEP MUM?"

Well, Emerson gladly took the oath, and the peanuts too, and the deal was closed.

"Now remember," says I, "you have taken the oath; and henceforth the sword of Damocles is suspended above your head; and nothing, not even *Mother*, can save you from its fall, if you utter so much as a *yip* about me from now on."

As that kind of language is always so impressive, I thought I would throw in a little without extra charge and watch the effect. And sure enough, after that,

whenever Emerson began to wax loquacious, all I had to do was to look hard at him and draw the sign of a sword in the air, and instantly he was struck dumb.

Now as Tad had behaved like a man of honor and astuteness, by laying low and trusting to my well-known generosity to do what was right, I rewarded him with an extra handful of peanuts; and from that time on, Tad knew which side his bread was buttered on.

CHAPTER VII

GETTING A START

WELL, Bill and I talked it all over at Gerry's board pile and decided that we were the victims of persecution.

"Gambling!" says Bill. "I'd like to know what they're up to themselves all the time? They give us hail Columbia for doing things, and then go and do them a good deal better themselves. There ain't a man in this town, hardly, but makes his money by gambling, or worse. There's Deacon Goodrich; he draws a long, pious face and talks religion till you are sick, and then beats every farmer that comes into his store, taking their goods for nothing and selling 'em his at about two hundred per cent profit. That's what you might call betting on a sure thing. And that's the way *he* does it."

"But," says I, thinking of Kitty, "is the Deacon any worse than the rest of 'em?"

"I should say not!" says Bill. "The others are just like him, or would be, if they could; and if they don't beat you, it's because they can't. There's old

John Skinner, just sits around like an old spider in the middle of a web, and charges twenty-five per cent interest, if he can get it, and gobbles in the farms like dead flies. And Arthur Wiley sells rotten buggies fixed up to fool the Frenchmen; and the lawyers shave notes and so on; and some sell rum, and the rest of 'em do their level best, and then make a big fuss about a few apples, or snapping the crack!"

"How about Uncle Dan'l Crump?" says I. "He *claims* to be the only honest man in town."

"Yes," says Bill, "he does; and that's just the kind you want to look out for. If Uncle Dan'l was half as honest as he claims, he couldn't do business in this town. Of course," says Bill, "your father is all right, and so is mine; and there are one or two others, like Amsy Jenks, that wouldn't take you in if they could."

"Yes, Bill, but such people never make any money, do they?"

"Lord, no!" says Bill.

"Then, Bill, we can't afford to imitate *them*, if we expect to succeed, can we? *No*, sir! If you are going to make money, and there is only one way to do it, you've got to choose that way, haven't you?"

"It looks like it," says Bill, looking as if there was no getting around my argument.

"And you've got to make money to be respected and looked up to, ain't you, Bill?"

"Well, I should say!"

"Yes, and don't you see, Bill, that unless a man makes money, he has got to *work!* Now ain't that so, Bill?"

"Well, he don't have to work forever," says Bill. "All he's got to do is work just long enough to get a start, and then work the rest of them for all he's worth."

"Yes, of course you have got to get a start," says I. "And that is just the question. How'll we get a start, Bill?"

"Oh, lots of ways. There's teaching school, now; I'm going to try for that, next fall."

"Well, that's all right for you, Bill, because you're older than I am. But maybe I'll have to work a little to start with till I am old enough to do better."

So we both decided that it was time to see about getting a start, in order to get some money and do business with the farmers, or let it out at twenty-five per cent interest; and then we would be respected and looked up to, instead of being threatened with the stick.

And that reminded me that there was going to be a job at building the fires and sweeping the schoolhouse and ringing the bell next term at the Academy; and that I could probably get it by getting ahead of the others and seeing Dr. Barker about it right away. The Doctor always liked me, anyhow, because I wrote articles for his paper, the "Star," and he said they were something wonderful. I had one all ready for him in my pocket

now, and I decided to take it down to the "Star" office, and offer it to the Doctor, so as to get him good-natured, and then ask him for the job; and if I didn't get it, we would know the reason why, because the Doctor was chairman of the school board, and I was already driving his cow at twenty cents a week, which was a sort of claim on him for more. So I marched into the office and laid the article down on the desk in front of him; and the Doctor looked at it and gave a big jolly laugh and began reading the piece, which was entitled: —

"GIRLS

"Girls are a necessary evil, which is something you have to put up with, whether you like it or not; and that is just where the trouble arises.

"Girls begin to boss you around when they are in their cradles, and they never let up till you are dead.

"In the words of the poet: —

> "'O woman, in our hours of ease,
> Uncertain, coy, and hard to please.'

"Now as girls are built on this plan, what can you expect of them? Nothing but what you get, which is chiefly good advice and bad reports to Father and errands to the dressmaker. The rest of the time they will be thinking up things for you to do.

"The chief duty of girls is looking pretty, which is easy enough for them, and trying on the clothes that you

bring them from the dressmaker; and if they don't fit to a T, back you go again with a flea in your ear.

"I knew a fellow about my age who spent all his spare time running errands for his sister; and she smiled on every one but him.

"A girl will smile on you, perhaps, if you are somebody else's brother and there is nothing wrong about your necktie; but otherwise, you might as well expect her to pay for the ice-cream.

"DICK NEWMAN."

The Doctor gave another jolly laugh, when he finished it, and wheeled around in his chair, and said, "That's the kind of thing we want, Dick; and anything I can do for you sometime, you let me know."

"All right," says I, "what do you say to letting me have the job to take care of the Academy next term?"

"Oh, ho!" says the Doctor. "So this is the meaning of this diplomacy! Well, well, you'll be a politician or a financier, if you don't look out! I hear you are the man that broke the bank at Monte Carlo."

"Oh, that's nothing," says I, carelessly. "Besides, Dad won't let me snap the crack any more; so I've got to get a start some other way."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Doctor. "Yes, we've all got to get a start. Well, how much do you expect to make out of this schoolhouse job?"

"Ten dollars," says I, for a starter.

"Too much, too much!" says the Doctor. "You talk like a financier."

"Only about eighty cents a week, Doctor. I say it's dirt cheap," says I.



"THAT'S THE KIND OF THING WE WANT, DICK."

"Yes," says the Doctor; "but the town can't afford it; and they would have me up for malfeasance in office. Besides," says he, "we've got to give all our money to that young man from Bowdoin for teaching

you boys Latin and Greek and French and German, and all that. What do you say to eight?"

"All right, I'll take it, if I have to," says I. "And you can give the other two dollars to the Bowdoin chap; only I want you to understand, Doctor, that I'm doing this to accommodate you; and that building the fires and so on is just as important for education as Latin and Greek and so on, even if you don't get quite as much out of it."

"Yes, that's so," says the Doctor; "but you keep 'em good and warm and tidy, Dick, on that eight dollars, and we'll consider you in the light of a public benefactor."

Well, that way of putting it was satisfactory to me; and I had got the job, anyhow; and when I told Dad about it, he said that was the way to earn your money; and now let's see that I earned it; as if there was any doubt about that!

The winter term opened that year with young Atwell of Bowdoin as teacher; and the way he loaded you up with the dead languages was a caution to cats. Bill said he never suffered so in his life. But Atwell was popular with the girls, and even with the boys; and I was proud to be his right-hand man, and have them all envying me whenever I got up without asking permission to fix the fires or bring in some more wood. Or perhaps young Atwell would say in his jolly way, "Say,

Dick, don't we need some more fire?" And then I would get up and stir up the coals in the two big box stoves, and pitch in the big sticks and bang the doors and wonder if Kitty was looking. Every one else was, but somehow, Kitty was always looking the other way, or else she was busy with her books; so that I didn't get as much satisfaction that way as I had expected. One reason why I had wanted that job was in order to impress Kitty; but you never know what is going to impress a girl; and even if they are impressed, you would never know it to look at them.

So, in less than a week, I was tired of that job, which was getting too much like work, anyhow; when along comes Bob Leighton, one day, as I was ringing the first bell at noon, and says to me, "Say, Dick, how much do you git for doing that?" says he.

"About three dollars a term for ringing the bell," says I.

"Gimme the job and I'll do it for one-fifty," says Bob.

"Take it," says I, without giving Bob a chance to repent; and with those words, I dropped the bell-rope and Bob took hold, and the job was his from that day on; and I had cleared one-dollar-fifty, without doing a stroke of work, barring the few days that I agreed to throw in to the bargain. But Bob was happy and so was I, especially as this was another proof of my business

astuteness which nobody could deny; and I believed that even Kitty would respect me, if she knew about it.

And then again, I realized as never before, that it wasn't necessary to work in order to make money. All you needed was to get a job, and wait till somebody offered to do the work for half the money, and then take him up.

Come to think of it, what was the use of my building the fires and sweeping the schoolhouse, if any one came along who wanted to do it worse than I did?

Well, I hadn't waited more than a day or two, before, sure enough, along comes John Bowles with a big wad of gum in his cheek. John had seen Bob hauling away on the bell-rope, and heard all about his bargain; and so, the minute he saw me, he made me a business proposition.

"Say, Dick, what'll you take for the rest of your job?"

Now John had a better head for business than Bob, because of his experience in swapping gum, and so on; and so I knew that he had got to be managed differently, if I was going to make much out of him. So I put on a reluctant look and said: —

"Well, I don't know, John. You see, I'm getting five dollars out of it, and I need the money bad. Besides, Atwell is pretty particular about the fires, and he'd be sure to kick, if I sold out to any one else."

"Oh, come on!" says John. "Tell you what, I'll do it for three and a half."

"Couldn't think of it," says I. "No, John, I've got to see that the work is done all right and —"

"Oh, gammon!" says John. "Ain't I as strong as two of you, and can't I do it twice as well as you can? Look at that muscle!" says he, slapping his arm. "Say, Dick, you lemme have the job and I'll do it for three dollars, and throw in half of my gum."

And then he drew it out of his mouth in a long, lovely rope and held it there to let the temptation work.

"You divide it square in the middle, and I'll let you have the job for three dollars," says I — "that is, I will, if you will —"

"You dry up!" says John, "it's a go!" and bit off the gum about halfway up; and the deal was closed.

"Now, John," says I, in a tone of anxiety, "you be careful and do that work right, or I'll have to take the job back."

"Bosh!" says John. "This is my job now, and you don't take it back, not much!"

Well, that was the way I wanted him to feel; and so I left him with some more good advice and went off to count up my gains.

One dollar and fifty on ringing the bell, and two more on the fires and the sweeping, and nothing to do but loaf and look on! If that wasn't a start, what was it?

Bill said that he couldn't have done it better himself, and that those were the methods that paid; and Charlie Barlow said, if he had known I was going to sell out, he could have offered me better terms than I got; but I told him I didn't want to make any more than I ought to; and he respected me for saying it; and all the boys admired my enterprise; and there was no trouble at all about it, except that one day, John Bowles let the room get cold, and young Atwell said: —

"This comes of the contract system," says he. "Look here, Dick, if you're going to be contractor, you've got to see that the public interests are safeguarded, or we'll all of us be down on you."

I looked rebukingly at John, who got up in a hurry, and fixed the fires to the queen's taste. But my reputation was made by that remark of Atwell's. Till then I hadn't known what I really was; but when I realized that I was a *contractor*, and that my system was the *contract system*, I saw that at last I had done something to be proud of. Now let them say what they pleased about minister's sons; if any of them could beat that, let them do it, or shut up.

Even Kitty looked at me respectfully, and Irene *whispered*, "My, how smart we think we are!" And the others looked various ways, as people do when they envy you and respect you and wish they had seen your chance.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MEDDLESOMENESS OF DAD

WELL, I never saw the beat of Dad for ruining a man's chances, just when every one was beginning to admire him! I never supposed he would be mean enough to do it, and I was just fool enough to think that the family would be proud of me when they heard that I was a contractor.

All the same, I was keeping rather mum about it, because I had my suspicions of Dad; when all of a sudden, Irene opened up on me about that piece in the "Star" and gave the whole thing away. Maybe Irene would have kept quiet about the contract, and maybe she wouldn't; but the minute she saw that piece about girls, she saw that it was one on her, and couldn't resist the temptation.

"My, how smart!" says she. "I'm going to write something about boys in this style: 'Boys are a necessary nuisance, which is something that ought to be headed up in a barrel and kept there till you want it.'"

"Oh, yes," says I, "it's easy enough after somebody else has showed you how. Why don't you go and write something of your own, Iyee Wowo?"

"Oh, I'm not smart enough for that," says Irene, sarcastically. "Dick's got all the smartness in this family. Dick's a contractor, he is. He's sold out his job to John Bowles."

"A contractor? Aha!" says Dad. "I *wondered* what he was loafing around here for, when he had the fires to build! So you sold out to John Bowles, did you? How much did you give him for doing the work?"

"Three dollars," says I. "All I could afford and make anything out of it."

"Yes, that's the lingo," says Dad. "He's got it by heart! And how much were *you* going to get, in the first place?"

"Five," says I.

"Ah! Very smart indeed! So you are going to make two dollars without doing a stroke of work?"

"Well, it was my job, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but you've got rid of the work, and kept about half the money! Do you call that honest?"

"Honest? Why ain't it honest? John Bowles offered to do it himself, didn't he? Yes, sir, and gave me some gum for the chance! That shows he wanted it bad enough; and if he's satisfied, what call has anybody got to kick about it?"

"You undertook the job, and it was your business to carry it out, or hand it over to some one else and let

him have all it was worth to do the work," says Dad. "Mother, just come here," says he, "and look at this young hopeful of ours! If he keeps on like this, he'll be nothing but one of these smart Yankee tricksters that the whole country is full of. I tell you, I won't have it!" says Dad, getting madder and madder. "No, sir, I won't! Now, Dicky, my little sonny, you can take your choice. Either you do the work and take the money, or let John Bowles do it and take the money. Now which is it?"

"Well, *ain't* I letting him do it, already, and giving him just what he asked?"

"Yes, but what did you ask for doing it? Nearly twice as much. And you thought even *that* was too little. — Oh, I know all about it from Dr. Barker; and so it *was*, little enough; and yet, you want to beat another boy out of his fair wages and pocket money that you haven't earned, although you have been taught all your life to do as you would be done by!"

"That's right," says I. "Ruin a man's chances with your old Golden Rule, that nobody ever thinks of but us! How's anybody going to make any money with *that* thing tagging after him? Look at Deacon Goodrich and old John Skinner, and Arthur Wiley and L. S. Blood, and Uncle Dan'l Crump and Gerry and Fenton, and all your leading parishioners! Wouldn't they take such a chance, if they could get it? Well,

I should say! That's the way they make their money; and that's the way money is made, by getting some one else to do the work, while you furnish the brains, and draw the profits. What's the matter with that? And every one honors *them;* and when I do the same thing, and make a little money to get a start, you jump on me and make me give it up!"

"Oh, hold on a minute," says Dad. "Deacon Goodrich doesn't go to our church, nor Arthur Wiley, nor old John Skinner."

"Well, all the rest of 'em do," says I, "and they're just as smart as the Deacon and Arthur and old John."

"Oh, they're all very smart, the whole lot of them," says Dad. "At least, that's what *they* think; but they're not so smart as they imagine; and neither are you," says Dad. "Anyhow, you're not going to be as smart as all that, not while I have charge of you. When you are grown up and come to your senses, if you *want* to be nothing but a smart, hard-fisted Yankee, why, then, *be* one, and welcome," says Dad, "but meanwhile, if I hear any more of such smartness, I shall doctor it with a stick."

That same old stick again, that Dad always lugged in at the end of his arguments, because they were too weak to convince you! I knew I was right, of course, and that every one in Belle Isle but my Dad would honor me for it, because they were practical business men.

But Dad was nothing but the Golden Rule minister on a small salary, that was always behindhand because they kept it out on interest for two or three months before they paid it in, and let us run up bills at the stores, till we owed it all by the time we got it, and the storekeepers had made big profits out of us. And that was what came of the Golden Rule! — no money to speak of and every one fleecing you right and left, and talking around that ministers hadn't any business capacity! And here I was, ready and able to hold my own with any of them; and yet Dad wanted to get me into the same fix that he was in! I *knew* that if I never got on or amounted to anything, and turned out a failure, and couldn't marry Kitty, it would all be owing to Dad and his Golden Rule.

But it was no use to say anything; and Dad had gone upstairs, anyhow, as if the argument was finished. So the result was that I had to take that job back from John Bowles for only two dollars, where I was giving him three, and the job had been mine in the first place; and he hadn't done a stroke of work on it, hardly, and then charged me a dollar for letting me have it back! I called that pretty mean of John; and I called it pretty mean of Dad to laugh the way he did, when I told him about the injustice that I had suffered. Dad just laughed heartlessly at me and said it served me right for being so smart myself in the first place;

and as for John Bowles, Dad said that if John wanted to be mean, that was his lookout and his father's; but *I* wasn't going to be that mean yet awhile, not as long as there were any birch trees a-growing in the woods.

"Birch trees!" says I. "Well, Dad, if I didn't have any better arguments than those, I'd give up beat, and not try to argue at all."

And then Dad laughed and chuckled and slapped his knee, and said, "Oh, my little sonny, you're only about fifteen years old yet, but you'll come round, after a while."

But I knew that Dad was wrong, because he always was, when he talked about birch trees, and so on.

Well, anyhow, nothing had been said to Dad about that bell-ringing deal of mine with Bob Leighton. Bonus started to tell; but I drew the sign of a sword in the air, and he wilted. So I cleared a little something on that deal, but not as much as I would have, if I hadn't written that article about girls for the "Star" and made Irene mad, so that she gave me away to Dad, who turned on the Golden Rule and spoiled everything.

But it was some comfort to think that when I grew up and went into business, the Golden Rule would have nothing to do with it.

CHAPTER IX

L. S. BLOOD

DAD said that the higher conduct had its rewards, as well as the lower; and we mustn't get it into our heads that nothing would pay but beating our neighbor, because honor and honesty were always the best investments in the long run. Not that we must always be thinking of rewards, says Dad, but just leave them to tend to themselves, and follow the higher conduct for its own sake.

"Nevertheless," says Dad, "as you have been pursuing the higher conduct lately, under some difficulties, I want to show you that I appreciate it; and so, if there is anything in particular you would like, we'll see if we can get it, provided it doesn't cost too much," says he.

Well, I thought that wasn't so bad for what little of the higher conduct I had pursued lately; so I told Dad that what I needed was a watch to tell the time of day by and help me to be punctual at school and to come home on time. (I didn't tell him that the watch would probably impress Kitty some, to say nothing of

the boys, because it was no use mentioning such things to Dad.)

But he fell in with the idea, right away; and he said my reasons were good ones; and that a watch was just the thing to encourage punctuality, and so on; and he had always been sorry he had had to sell his gold watch to pay the bills when he was out of a parish that time, because he'd always intended to let me have it some day: but all the same, we'd get one now that would do just as well, only it would have to be silver instead of gold.

"That's all right, Dad," says I. "Silver is plenty good enough for me;" and then we started down town, Dad explaining on the way that virtue was always sure of its reward, if we were only patient enough; and I thought mebbe there might be something in it, seeing that I was going to get something out of it, this time.

"But first," says Dad, "we will just step in here at Mr. Gerry's and get some money. My salary has been due for some time, now; so I guess we'll see what's become of it."

Well, he found what had become of it. Gerry and Fenton were in there talking politics, and when Dad changed the subject to business, their faces got as long as yardsticks.

"That money?" says good old Mr. Gerry, who was our church treasurer. "Oh, yes, certainly," says he.

"Say, Fenton, what's become of that money, anyhow?" "Let's see," says Fenton, who was one of our shrewdest business men, with his upper lip shaved and a pipe in his teeth and a business eye which he closed when he reflected with the other one. "Let's see," says he. "We let it out to Arthur Wiley a while, and then Tub Wilkins had it; and now, seems to me, L. S. Blood's got it, ain't he?"

"That's the man!" says jolly old Mr. Gerry, looking pleased to think they had found it. "Well, well, we'll get it right away from Blood, and let the Elder have it. Could 'a' let you had it earlier, Elder, only you see," says he, "we thought we might as well make a little interest out of it for the church, as we knew you wouldn't want it for a spell, because you could get all the credit you needed at the stores; and your credit is good, Elder. Every one knows that."

"Certainly," says Dad, pleasantly, "only you see, I would a little rather have the money."

"Certainly, of course!" says Mr. Gerry, "and we'll get it for you right away. Come along up to L. S. Blood's, Elder, and see if he's got it ready."

No, L. S. Blood hadn't got it ready, because he was pressed for time and pushed for money and so on. L. S. was a big, stout, hearty man with *his* upper lip shaved, and a look on him like a pillar of society; and he hemmed and hawed and gave about forty good

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reasons why he couldn't let Dad have the money at present; but he could advance a little on it now, and let the Elder have credit for anything he needed. How would that do, says L. S.

Well, Dad swallowed down his objections, and said it would do; which is the kind of lie a minister has to tell when the truth would embarrass the church people. In Dad's place, I wouldn't have bought a thing of L. S. Blood, under the circumstances; but I suppose Dad wanted to show me how nice the Golden Rule would work, and so he asked L. S. if he had any silver watches that would do for me.

Certainly, L. S. had just the thing, — a brand-new lot of sterling silver watches just in from Boston.

"And now, Elder," says L. S. in a confidential tone, as he laid the tray of them before us on the counter, "if you want one of them watches, I'll let you have it at —" (and then he lowered his voice and mentioned a sacrifice which he was willing to make in consideration of the sacred relations of pastor and parishioner).

I must say, I was always suspicious when they mentioned a sacrifice in Belle Isle; because it generally turned out that you were the one that was sacrificed. But Dad said that that was reasonable enough; and *I* didn't want to look a gift horse in the mouth; and so we took the watch, and a sacrifice chain along with it; and Dad handed them over to me and said, "There



CERTAINLY, L. S. HAD JUST THE THING.

now, Dick, I hope this will encourage you to persevere, and always be upright in your dealings with your fellow-men."

Yes, it encouraged me a big lot! Scarcely had I got home with that watch, before a brass spot came out on the lid of it; and I showed it to Dad, and he said: "Hm! We'll see about it."

So back he goes with the watch, and the following confab ensues between him and L. S. Blood:—

"How is this, Mr. Blood?" says Dad. "Didn't you sell me this watch for silver?"

"Well — ahem! I bought it for silver," says L. S.

"Yes, but here is a spot on it that looks like *gold*," says Dad.

"Is that so?" says L. S. "Lemme see it a minute."

And then he took it and examined it carefully, as if it surprised him. "Well," says he, "anyhow, I bought it for silver, and it ought to be silver, and if it *ain't* silver, I don't see how that's my fault."

"No, but it might be a misfortune," says Dad, in a way he had, sometimes.

Well, L. S. stuttered and stumbled and argued and explained; and Dad made it easy for him and took all his statements at par; and the result was that L. S. let Dad have another one of the same kind, in hopes that *that* one would turn out better! And so, as there was no other way out of it, without making a row

(which Dad couldn't afford to do, he being the minister, and expected to put up with anything they did to him), Dad just took the other watch (which turned out brassier than the first one), and said nothing about it. But I saw that he was disgusted, and so was I; and as soon as we were out of the store, I said:—

"There now, Dad, you see that's all your Golden Rule amounts to."

"I don't see how the Golden Rule had anything to do with this transaction," says Dad, grimly.

"No, Dad, and that's just it. It never *does* have anything to do with anything in this town. 'Tain't practical, Dad, that's all there is to it. You've just *got* to look out for yourself, or they'll do you up in no time, especially if you are a minister. You don't catch me being a minister, no, siree! — and having 'em let my salary out on interest and making me take it out in old brass — not much!"

"Yes," says Dad, "but on the other hand, don't let me catch you being one of these smart, tricky Belle Islers, either."

"Oh, you don't want *me* to be smart," says I, witheringly.

"No, I don't!" says Dad. "You let me catch you being smart in that way, and you shall smart for it. You just be smart about your books, and you'll be plenty smart enough for me."



"Books!" says I. "What good are they for a business man? All the smartest men in this town don't know anything to speak of."

"Quite right," says Dad; "and that's just what ails them. You'd be as big a fool as they are, if I'd let you. Not that I want to run down the people who are supporting me," says he, "because there are lots of good people in Belle Isle; and no doubt but they mean well; only, they have a good deal to learn, and so have you, my little sonny," says he.

"Yes, Dad, and I'm learning it fast," says I. "The first thing you've got to learn, in this town, is how to keep them from skinning you; and seems to me, Dad, it's high time you were learning that yourself, or they'll be selling us up for old junk."

"Very well, if you dislike the way they behave, see that you don't go and do the same thing yourself, that's all," says Dad; "because that kind of smartness is apt to prove a boomerang. There's Mr. Blood, now! He may have fooled us once, but you don't suppose he'll be able to do it again?"

"No, Dad, but somebody just like him will, because there's no other kind in Belle Isle; and we've *got* to trade somewheres, haven't we? Yes, sir! And somebody just like us will go to L. S. Blood to get fooled, and he knows it; and as long as the supply of fools holds out, you'll see him doing business at the old stand."

"Fudge, fudge," says Dad. "I know several that wouldn't behave that way. Look at Mr. Gerry!" says he. "Didn't he take us all into his house, and keep us a month or so when we first came here, without charging us a cent, — come now?" says he.

"Oh, well," says I, "there was *one* good man in Sodom and Gomorrah."

"Well, look at Amsy Jenks!" says Dad, as if two was the limit; and so it was, just about.

"Yes, look at him!" says I. "And look at everybody imposing on him, right and left, and borrowing all his tools, and so on, and running into debt to him and never paying up; and that's the result of *his* honesty! It's no use, Dad; you set out to be any better than other people, and they'll size you up for a sucker and have you in the frying-pan in no time."

Well, Dad was going to argue the point; but just then, sure enough, along comes Amsy Jenks, as angels always do when you talk about them. Amsy was looking about seven feet high, as usual, and as cheerful as ever, and as if he wished somebody would borrow his horse and forget to bring it back.

"Good morning, Elder, good morning," says he, shaking hands with Dad. "How's everything going?"

And then Dad told another lie and said everything was going first-rate, and I left him and Amsy repre-

senting what virtue there was in town, and went on by myself.

Dad always fell back on Amsy, when there was any doubt about human nature; but all the same, I noticed that he looked kind of down in the mouth, after that watch deal with L. S. Blood, and I didn't wonder. I was kind of sorry for Dad, banging away every Sunday about considering your neighbor, and so on, and making about as much impression as water on a duck's back; but I didn't want to hurt his feelings, so I said no more about it, just then. All the same, I made up my mind that a man had got to consider his neighbor in more ways than one, and not depend on him to do right without watching him; and Bill said that was about it; and so did Dave Nickerson, the next time I took a violin lesson.

"Beat you, did he?" says Dave, with a big laugh, when I told him about the watch. "Bet your life he did! L. S. Blood would beat the angels out of their golden crowns, if he got a chance, which he ain't likely to git. Trouble with these Belle Islers," says Dave, cocking his game eye up at the angels, "they all of 'em stopped growin' when they was fifteen years old, so they ain't got only about moral sense enough to swear; and that's all I got myself; and I don't give a blank for it, either, in this town. Now, here's the way you play the old Devil's

Dream, and a blank good tune for Belle Isle!" says Dave.

Of course, when Dave spoke about people getting stuck at fifteen years old, he didn't reflect that I was only about that old myself; but I let it pass, so as not to mortify his feelings. Besides, it was some comfort to hear him swear at the way I 'd been taken in.

All that Mother said about the watch was that Mr. Blood was a nice, pleasant man to meet socially, but it might be just as well to keep an eye on him in a business way, which was just my opinion, precisely.

And Irene said I had better look out when I got out that watch before Kitty, and keep my finger over the brassy part.

And Tad said he'd give me thirteen cents for it, if he got it for a jack-knife he'd had an offer on. And Bonus wanted to know if it would go all the time. I got pretty sick of this kind of talk after a while, what with the boys guying me about it at school, and I never daring to look at the time of day before Kitty. And I believe Irene told her about it, because one day Kitty said to me: "Dick, what time is it?" and then ran off and laughed with the girls as if it was awful funny.

That decided *me* to get rid of that watch right away. First, I thought I would fire it into the river, or after



a cat, or something; but then I came to my senses and realized that I could *swap it!*

So I swapped the watch for a pistol that wouldn't hit a barn-door, and the pistol for a sled that got beat every time; and the sled for a pair of skates that were worse than nothing; and at last, I swapped the skates for another watch that was silver on one side and would go three days in a week, if you shook it up every once in a while. And then Elik Easy, who was a first-class swapper, said he'd take it up to Madewaska for me and swap it with the Frenchmen. And he did; and came back with a colt that he got for it, and that would lie down in the middle of the road when he took a notion. And then Elik sold the colt for ten dollars and gave me five, which was very square of him. And I took the five dollars to old Gunn, the jeweller, and got a sure enough silver watch for it, that would run all right, and that I could take out before Kitty; and I called that pretty good.

"Ah, swapping again, as usual!" says Dad, the first time he saw the watch. "Who got the worst of it this time?"

"Now, Father," says Mother, "do let the boy alone for once. You can't expect him to keep from swapping at his age. Let him swap till he's sick of it; and by and by, when he's old enough to know better, maybe he'll outgrow it," says Mother.



I was glad to hear *one* of our family show a little common sense for once; and it seemed to have some effect on Dad. Anyhow, he just asked to look at the watch, and then handed it back and said, oh, well, he guessed the other fellow didn't get beat so very bad.

It was a mean thing to say, after all the trouble I'd been at to get that watch; and besides, there wasn't a word of truth in it.

Now, the point to all this is that L. S. Blood was a leading citizen; and yet, look at him, will you? But he was nothing to Arthur Wiley, as I shall proceed to prove.

CHAPTER X

ARTHUR WILEY

WE had some kitchen chairs in our family that *had* been pretty nice, once upon a time, till they got all banged up from being moved around the country. We liked those chairs, because they had travelled all over creation with us, and were just like members of the family; and there was nothing the matter with them, except that the paint was off and the rounds were loose, and the backs were rickety and the legs were liable to give way any time and let you down on the floor. We could have glued them in ourselves, but Dad said no, Arthur Wiley was the man to fix them, because he was in the furniture business, and knew just how it was done.

So I had to borrow Amsy Jenks's team and load those chairs up on it, and carry them down to Arthur's, and tell him to take the rounds out of the worst two of them, and glue them into the other four; and Arthur said: certainly; leave 'em right there, and he'd fix 'em up as good as new.

Well, we waited and waited for those chairs to get

done, and at last Dad and I went down to Arthur's and wanted to know if they weren't about ready by this time; and Arthur took his pipe out of his teeth and shut one eye, and squinted around with the other one after the chairs.

"Them old chairs?" says he. "Oh, yes! Fact is, Elder, they wa'n't no good, and I couldn't fix 'em no-



"FACT IS, ELDER, THEY WA'N'T NO GOOD."

how, so I had to throw 'em out on the scrap pile, and I guess they got used up for kindling wood or something."

And then he stuck his pipe in his teeth again and looked at Dad with the eye that was doing business, as much as to say: "What you going to do about it?"

It was this kind of thing that got Arthur the reputation of being the smartest man in Belle Isle. And he looked at Dad and Dad looked at him; and at last Dad said: Well, ahem! He was somewhat surprised, because he had supposed the chairs were worth fixing, and he could have fixed them himself, if he hadn't supposed that Arthur could do it so much better; however, if they were gone, he supposed that that was all there was to it.

And then Arthur said, Oh, well, he had some new ones that he'd let us have at a sacrifice, if Dad said so; but Dad didn't care to look at them just then; and I could see that he was pretty mad inside and was just holding in for the sake of appearances; and so was I, and we got out of the shop as quick as we could.

Mother almost cried when she heard that the chairs were gone, and said she always liked those chairs, and that Dad could have fixed them himself, if he hadn't had so much Greek and Latin and theology and so on to attend to; and she said she never saw such a set of scamps in all her born days as these Belle Islers, never! and it was a pity they didn't believe in fire and brimstone any longer, because anything else was too good for them.

I had said the same thing to Dad no end of times, and that was all the good it did; but when a man's wife gets after him, he has to listen, whether he likes it or not. So Dad just listened and looked sheepish and discouraged, and said, "Fudge, fudge!" and went off up to his study. I was beginning to be sorry for Dad, because it was cannon to right of him, cannon to left of him, and so on. First he got cheated down town, and then when he got home the whole family blew him up for it.

And that wasn't the worst of it, either. A while after, I was up in Eli Teak's office, which was over the Post-Office, in the Sunrise Building; and I saw a sight there that took away what little confidence I had left in human nature.

Eli was a young lawyer who came to our church and praised up Dad's sermons and called on Irene once in a while, along with Hal Goodrich and Sam Gerry, and Bill Grey, and so on; and as I was saying, he had a lot of new chairs up in his office one day when I called there; and they were all painted and varnished and striped in gilt, and had nice pear-shaped seats and old-fashioned backs, like our old ones; only they looked as good as new. And the minute my eye lighted on them, I said: "Hello, Eli, where'd you get the chairs?"

"Down at Arthur Wiley's," says Eli. "They were

some old ones that he had kicking around, and I asked what he'd take for the lot; and he said: 'Oh, they're no good. You can have 'em, if you'll take 'em away.' So I took 'em away," says Eli, "and glued in the rounds and painted 'em up, and they look as good as new, don't they?" says he, looking proud of his work.

"I should say they did!" says I. "Eli, do you want to know where those chairs came from? They came from our house; and Dad had me carry them down to Arthur Wiley's to get them fixed up, and Arthur said, Oh, yes, he'd fix 'em as good as new; and this is how he's done it."

Well, Eli looked mortified nearly to death. Eli was a pretty good fellow, if they *did* call him a snide lawyer, some of them; and he said: "Look here, Dick, I'm not going to take your chairs away from you, and have your father and mother and sister thinking I'm as mean and sharp as Arthur Wiley. You take those chairs right along home, and you're welcome to what I did on them."

"No, Eli," says I, firmly. "We can't take 'em now, and it wouldn't be any use to offer 'em to Dad. You don't know my Dad, Eli. He's the biggest fool in this town, and he just *likes* to let himself get beat right along. Besides, you fixed the chairs up, and now they're yours; and it's too late, now, anyhow. What do you suppose that fool of a Dad of mine did to Arthur

Wiley for doing us out of those chairs? Throw him over the dam, or anything of that kind? Oh, no! He just went and *bought some more chairs of him;* and played right into his hands and helped him do what he set out to. And that's the way it is in the ministry, Eli. You've got to have every low skunk doing you up; and you can't go and lick him for it the way you'd like to. Oh, no; *you've* got to live by the Golden Rule, and smile and look pleasant at the skunks, no matter what they do to you."

"That's right," says Eli. "I wouldn't be a minister for a farm; but if I *was* one, I'd keep a shot-gun to preach to skunks with. You tell your father that these chairs are his," says Eli; "and he's got to take 'em back, whether he wants to or not."

But Dad wouldn't take 'em, just the same; and he told Eli, "Oh, you're welcome to them, Mr. Teak," says he in his elegant, free-handed style, as if he had money in the bank. And the result was that Eli had some stylish chairs, and we had a lot that looked like the kind they put in Noah's arks, and that came unglued in no time and broke if you looked at them; and Arthur Wiley had the money that he made on the sacrifice.

That was the kind of man my Dad was: letting people beat him right and left, and then rewarding them for doing it!

The whole family was so disgusted with that chair deal, that we made Dad's life miserable for him, for some time after; and Irene would say: "There's the cat on one of the new chairs! Quick, Dick, and get her off, before it breaks!" And I said: "Sit light on that chair, Tad, or you're a goner." And Mother said: "I suppose Arthur Wiley paid his subscription to the church in those chairs?" (which was just exactly what he did).

And Dad would split wood and mutter to himself, the way he did when he was working up something good and warm for the church. And sure enough, the next Sunday, they got a hot one on Jacob and Esau. And Dad said that some people seemed to think that humanity was divided into knaves and fools, like those two, and you had got to be either one kind or the other. "Whereas," says Dad, "there *is* such a thing as an honest man, even if you *do* have to hunt for one like Diogenes with his lantern."

He said, just imagine a lot of people standing in a circle with their hands in each other's pockets, and that was modern society. While you were picking somebody else's pockets, the man behind you was picking yours; and so you didn't gain much that way; and even if you did, it wouldn't last, because some other pick-pocket that was smarter than you would come along and clean you out, just as you had done to the other

fellow; and that was just the smart kind of game that people were playing, he said. And then, he waded into the game and called it names for about fifteen minutes, till you would think the whole congregation would look sick. But they didn't. Fenton looked over at L. S. Blood to see how that set on *him;* and Blood looked at Gerry, and Gerry looked at Eli Teak, and Eli looked at Arthur Wiley, and *he* wasn't there; and every one applied it to some one else, which is the usual way with sermons.

As for Dad's argument about the circle of pickpockets, I could see the weak point in that, and so could the rest of them, judging by their looks. Of course if none of the pickpockets was smarter than the rest, nobody would be any better off; but that wasn't the way of it, by a jugful. Some were smarter than others; and when it came to picking pockets, the smart ones would be smarter at it than the slow ones, wouldn't they? And couldn't a good, smart man hang on to his own pockets while he was picking the next man's? Well, I should say! Look at Arthur Wiley, and L. S. Blood! There was L. S. now, and Gerry and Fenton and all our smartest men, sitting right there in front of Dad and listening with one eye! And you saw that they saw Dad's argument all right, but they were willing to take their chances. It was a good sermon that Dad preached them; but there is always some way of getting

around any sermon that ever *I* heard; and you could see as plain as day that they were all of 'em getting around this one, except, maybe, Amsy Jenks and one or two others.

Well, our people were a good-natured lot, anyhow; and they never got mad at Dad, even if he did larrup them good and hard, because, they mostly applied it to Deacon Goodrich, and other people outside of our church. And after this sermon was over, L. S. Blood and Fenton and Gerry and Eli Teak and Amsy Jenks and a lot of women all came up and congratulated Dad, and said *that* was the kind of doctrine we needed, instead of that old fire and brimstone kind that nobody believed in any more, except old Elder Pritchard, and he wasn't having any success with it. And they said our kind of religion was picking up; and maybe it was; but I noticed that Dad's salary was just as far behind as ever; and people kept right on getting him to take things that he didn't want, instead of cash. Of course, Dad was all right in theory, maybe; but when it came right down to business, the world wasn't built on his plan.

Bill and I talked it over with Eli Teak up in his office in the Sunrise Building, and we decided that this was the truth.

Eli said he wondered why people hired a minister to tell 'em things on Sunday, that they knew wouldn't

be any use to them on week-days. And Bill said he supposed it was because they enjoyed their cussedness more if it was forbidden to them, just as they did their rum. Bill said that Dave Nickerson went to a temperance meeting once in a while, just to whet up his appetite; and probably that was why people went to church; to whet up *their* appetites for business.

And then Eli said that as nearly as he could make out, people seemed to all behave about the same, no matter what kind of religion they had. "For example," says Eli, "there's Deacon Goodrich, he pins his faith to fire and brimstone; and L. S. Blood pins his to the Golden Rule, but when it comes to a business deal, you couldn't tell which was which."

And then Eli said that the law was a tough proposition; and sometimes he wished he was out of it, because you had to take anything that came along, if you wanted to live; but it sort of rested him to hear about something better once in a while; and he supposed that was the way with the rest of them. And then Eli looked at his new chairs, and turned red, and twisted in one of them, and said: —

"Dick, you tell your father that since he absolutely refuses to take back these chairs, I shall accept them as a present, and try to return the favor some day."

And Eli did. He subscribed ten dollars to Dad's salary; and he didn't ask Dad to take it out in law,

either. They all made fun of Eli in Belle Isle, and called him Ichabod Crane, and no end of things; but I couldn't see but he was as good as any of them, and a good deal better than some, if he *was* so afraid of the girls.

Which reminds me that I was just coming out of Eli's office when Kitty went by; and I was going to pretend not to see her till she got nearly past; only, the trouble was, I pretended so long that she got clear by before I realized it, and then it was too late.

So there was another chance wasted on the desert air, as the poet says! Oh, yes, I was pretty smart when Kitty was around!



CHAPTER XI

UNCLE DAN'L CRUMP

SO there is Arthur Wiley for you; and if anybody says that the way of the transgressor is hard, I would like to show him Arthur's property in the way of real estate and money out at interest and a big house on Main Street. The only kind of a transgressor whose way was hard in Belle Isle, was a man that set out to walk by the Golden Rule.

Take Amsy Jenks, for instance! But never mind about him just yet, because first we will consider a specimen of the kind of honesty that was practised in Belle Isle, which was the celebrated case of Uncle Dan'l Crump.

Take one of my business encounters, for instance, in which I was expected to get the best of Uncle Dan'l, and, at the same time, live up to the Golden Rule!

"Here, Dick," says my Mother, "I want you to go down to the store and get two dozen eggs and five pounds of butter; and tell them I want eggs this time, and not chickens; and *don't*, for pity's sake, let Tommy Dodge give you any more of that strong butter," says

she. "That Tommy is getting pretty near as smart as you are."

"Not by a long shot," says I. "Who got that last lot of butter and eggs, anyhow; me or Dad? If *I'd* got 'em, they'd have been all right, Tommy or no Tommy; but Dad got 'em, and so Tommy skinned the life out of him, as usual."

"Their own minister, too!" says Mother, looking as if she'd like to cuff somebody. "I don't see how they can look him in the face on Sunday."

"They don't, Mother; they just sit and squint at him, and think up ways to get around the Golden Rule that Dad's always talking about. If I was a preacher, I'd give 'em hell, as Dave Nickerson says; only, they wouldn't take any stock in that, either. As Dave says, this town don't scare worth a damn."

"Look here," says Mother, "that's pretty language for a boy of your age! If you're going to talk like that, I shall stop those violin lessons with Mr. Nickerson before you get to talking just like him."

"Bosh!" says I. "Mr. Nickerson's all right. Dave's just as good as the rest of 'em. Just swears a little more, that's all; and if I was Dad, I'd hire him to swear for me."

"Go along and get those things," says Mother, and I went.

I was kind of provoked with Mother for thinking I

wasn't any smarter than Tommy Dodge; because by this time, all of our family were pretty good at a bargain — all except Dad; and even he couldn't be beat *quite* as easy as he used to be.

We got our groceries at Uncle Dan'l Crump's, mostly, because his was the nearest store; and one of them was as good as another. Uncle Dan'l was the only honest man in Belle Isle, to hear him tell about it, which he did most of the time. And sure enough, the minute I came near the store, there was Uncle Dan'l sitting out on a dry-goods box in front of the place and giving a free lecture to any one that came along on how lonesome an honest man felt in this town; and how hard it was to do business with every one against him.

"But I'm an honest man, if I do have to say it myself," says Uncle Dan'l, in a kind of sad, grumpy tone that he had. "And I don't sell no tobacco and I don't sell no rum; and I won't have 'em in my store; and I don't care if I do lose money by it. I know I'm an honest man, and they know it, too, no matter what they say; and I tell you, an honest man feels pretty lonesome in this town."

Everybody in Belle Isle looked happy over their business astuteness except Uncle Dan'l, and he always looked sad and grumpy, as if he had just got beat in a business deal, which he hadn't, nobody in town being able to beat Uncle Dan'l in a deal. Well, it all came of

being so honest, I suppose, and feeling so bad about it, because there was nobody to keep you company.

Dad used to try and cheer Uncle Dan'l up by telling him what an influence for good he must be in this community, and how much everybody owed him for setting them such an example. Dad was telling this to Uncle Dan'l when I came along, and Dave Nickerson was listening with his game eye on the angels.

"Well," says Dave, taking a good bite off a plug of tobacco, "I'm so damn virtuous myself, I ain't got no time for nobody else. Hades!" says Dave, "a man feels lonesome in this town if he happens to be keepin' one o' the ten commandments."

And then Dave tipped me a wink and started for Tub Wilkins's hotel, to get some ginger pop, he said; and Dad concealed a smile from Uncle Dan'l, who looked like the north side of a tombstone.

"That Dave Nickerson's a bad man," says Uncle Dan'l, in a croaking bullfrog tone of voice. "He smokes and chews and spits and drinks and swears. Ginger pop! Humph! He can't fool me. He don't go up there to Tub Wilkins's for no ginger pop," says Uncle Dan'l; "and what's more, I wouldn't have no boy of mine taking lessons on the fiddle of *him*."

Well, Dad tried to explain that Dave was the best fiddler in town and gave me lessons for next to nothing —

"Yes," says I, "where every one else skins the life out of you!"

"Oh, not at all, not at all!" says Dad, hastily, though he knew it was the truth; and then went on explaining how Dave didn't swear so very much when I was around; which was so; and what was more, he didn't sell us any groceries, either, if Dad had cared to mention it.

Well, I left Dad and Uncle Dan'l fixing it up between them, while I went in and asked Tommy Dodge for the butter and eggs. Tommy said he had some he'd been keeping for us, and was going to put 'em up right away, as if they were a little too nice for anything. Tommy *was* pretty smart, I admit; and every one said he was bound to succeed; but I was a little too smart for him that time.

"Hold on a minute, Tommy," says I; "let's have a look at those things before you put 'em up." Well, I looked at those eggs, and they were *green;* and I smelt of that butter, and oh, my! and then I said to Tommy very politely: —

"Look here, Tommy, you made a slight mistake. It was butter I ordered, and not axle grease; and as for the eggs, you just keep 'em awhile, and you'll have a flock of spring chickens. We don't want to rob anybody up at our house, Tommy."

Well, Tommy just looked at me and lowered one eye-

lid and said: "Well, *somebody's* got to eat those things, ain't they?"

"That's all right, Tommy: work 'em off on anybody you like; only, you can't work 'em off on us."

Well, Tommy swore up hill and down that the eggs were just churned and the butter was just laid; and he'd been keeping 'em a-purpose for our family (which was a fact); till by and by, Uncle Dan'l heard the fuss and came in and blew Tommy up for trying to work off those things on us, and made him give me some of the kind he ate himself. "And I want you to understand that I'm an honest man," says Uncle Dan'l, "and I don't intend to cheat nobody, if I can help it." And Tommy just listened and kept mum and winked at me, as if all that was just playing to the grand stand.

Well, I took some of Uncle Dan'l's butter that wasn't so bad; but as all the eggs were nearly ready to fly, I told Tommy I guessed I'd look a little farther, if he didn't object.

Of course, Tommy and I were good friends, and he used to take me to ride behind his gray horse; but we both of us knew that friendship was one thing and business was another; and that neither of them ought to have anything to do with each other. I'd be ashamed of myself if I couldn't do business as well as the next man, without having him consider me all the time, the way Dad says we ought to. I respected

Tommy for doing the best he could with that stuff, rotten as it was; and, as he said, *somebody* had got to eat it; only, I was bound it shouldn't be our folks.

But just now it looked sort of embarrassing for Tommy; so Dad said he guessed we'd better be going, because we had another errand up street.

"Well, Dad," says I; "I got the best of Tommy Dodge that time, didn't I?"

"Hum!" says Dad, "I'm afraid Tommy is a little too smart; but I guess Uncle Dan'l is honest, anyhow."

"Maybe he is," says I, "about tobacco and rum; but when it comes to butter and eggs, I just as lief go somewhere else, if there was anywhere to go."

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad. "Fifteen-year-old boys shouldn't know so much. Probably it was only Tommy Dodge that wanted to sell you those things."

"Yes, Dad, and probably it was only Tommy Dodge that kept them for sale, and not Uncle Dan'l! It's no use, Dad, you know as well as I do that Uncle Dan'l Crump is the only honest man in town, if you listen to *him;* and so are all the others, if you listen to *them;* but the more they talk about honesty, the more you've got to look out."

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad, "you are hardly old enough to judge of such matters."

"Maybe not, Dad," says I; "but I'm a pretty good judge of butter and eggs, especially when you can smell



'em a yard or two away; and if it's honest to work off that kind on ministers' families, then Uncle Dan'l is an honest man; and so is Arthur Wiley and old John Skinner and L. S. Blood and —"

"Sh! Sh!" says Dad. "Here comes Mr. Blood now! Good morning, Mr. Blood!"

"Morning, Elder!" says L. S., chipper as a robin, the way he always was when he'd just been skinning somebody. "That was a first-class sermon you give us yesterday, Elder, about treasures in earthen vessels. That's just what we are, Elder, precisely, — earthen vessels with a few good things rattling round inside of us. That's the plan we're built on, and our duty is to put up with it and have more charity to our neighbor's failin's. That's the kind of preachin' we need in this town, 'stid of that old fire and brimstone kind that nobody believes in no more, 'cept old Elder Pritchard, and he ain't havin' no success with it. Charity to our neighbor's failin's; that's what we need, Elder, that's what we need!"

Well, maybe it *was* what they needed; but if I'd been in Dad's place, I'd have soused them in brimstone up to their necks, figuratively speaking, as Dad says; because, what they needed in Belle Isle was less charity and more particular fits.

I was pretty disgusted with L. S. Blood on account of that watch he'd worked off on us; so I just left him

and Dad passing the time of day and went along after the eggs.

Dad could say what he liked, but I knew that he knew I'd got the best of him in our argument, and that honesty was something besides not selling rum and tobacco. It was what you *did* sell, and not what you didn't, that counted. And as for those eggs and butter, if you kept smart Eliks like Tommy Dodge to work 'em off for you, what was the difference?

And Gabe Whittaker, the head man at Uncle Dan'l's, was just as smart as Tommy Dodge, only smarter. Gabe was named after the Angel Gabriel, I suppose; but it failed to strike in so deep that you couldn't tell which was which easy enough. Gabe always *looked* so good and solemn and pious that it was painful to look at him. All the same, people said that Gabe would bear watching, when it came to business; and I guess he would, judging by our experience. I suppose Uncle Dan'l Crump was honest *himself;* but *any one* could afford to be honest, with Gabe Whittaker and Tommy Dodge keeping store for him.

And that was just the way with all our honest men. Deacon Goodrich claimed to be awfully honest, too, and had pious spells like Gabe Whittaker; but he kept a head man by the name of Jim Cheatham who was slicker than soap grease; so that the Deacon's business didn't suffer any to speak of.

But the Deacon was a cheerful sort of chap, with a good word for everybody, and not groaning all the time about his honesty like Uncle Dan'l. Besides, the Deacon was Kitty's father; and I say when a man has done a good thing like that, we can afford to overlook a few business deals in his case.

Well, I had to go all over town after some eggs that were half decent; and when I got home with them, Mother said the hens that laid those eggs were gone to their reward, and she wished the man that sold 'em was gone to his.

It's awful hard work to please a woman, as the poet says, especially with rotten eggs.

Which reminds me that as I was coming back with those eggs, I saw Kitty coming up the street in a blue dress and a white straw hat, in which she looked just like an angel, as Irene said. Well, *this* time I was resolved not to lose the chance; so I got all ready to bow, when what does Kitty do but sail by as if there was nobody in sight, although she could see Bill and Charlie and every one else on the street!

Well, I never saw anything so revengeful as a girl is with her prettiest things on! But I ought to have known it, because Irene always put on her most flamgorgeous fixings when she was going to be especially mean to Bill, or Hal, or any of them. It's no use setting out to be good to a girl, anyhow, because you get on a good deal better by treating them like dogs.



CHAPTER XII

GOODRICH AND CHEATHAM

AND that reminds me that when Deacon Goodrich heard of some of my business deals that Dad sat on, he offered to take me right into his store, if Dad would say the word.

And that shows the difference between the Deacon and Dad. To hear Dad talk, you'd say I was going straight to the bow-wows; and now, here was the Deacon offering to take me in, all on account of those very deals! And only last Sunday Dad had preached on: "A prophet is not without honor but in his own country and in his own house"; and there was I, right in front of him, and Dad never saw the point!

It was just like Dad to do that; and as if that wasn't enough, he had to go and say *no* to the Deacon's offer; because Dad said he was going to educate me. And then the Deacon offered to take Tad in (because Tad was pretty good at a bargain, too; and Bonus could have beaten either of us, only that we were able to lick him as a last resort). But Dad said he didn't want Tad taken in; he was going to educate him, too; and Bonus and Irene and the whole lot of us.

So I lost that chance, all because Dad was so crazy about education, — as if that amounted to anything, and as if I wouldn't have been a good deal better off without it! Because, of course, if I had gone into the Deacon's store, maybe I could have got to be his partner, like Jim Cheatham, and married Kitty; but now, it mightn't be so easy!

I was mad at Dad for quite a while, on account of his mistake; and to show what I missed by it, just look at the business the Deacon was doing in Belle Isle!

The Deacon had a big store on the corner of Main and Bridge streets, where he did a flourishing business with the honest farmer, mostly, who used to come into town with a load of potatoes and dirt, and old eggs and strong butter, and so on, and went out again grumbling to beat the band with a few rotten groceries and some patent medicine for his indigestion.

Henry Gilly of Cattle Hill said that the groceries of Belle Isle were eating the insides right out of us. He said that our morals were gone already, and that what was left of our intestines wouldn't last much longer.

But Henry was one of the farmers that the Deacon did business with; and how the Deacon ever got the best of any of them was a mystery, considering how smart they were themselves. But he must have done it somehow, because there was his property to show for it.

But all that was no more than what every one did if they could; and the only thing they could really find against the Deacon was that, living in a big mansion himself, he kept a ratty old ruin of a place, right across the road, which he let to a family of Frenchmen at a sacrifice.

People said that the Deacon's cattle were stabled better; but Frenchmen were considered a long way after cattle in Belle Isle—that is, unless they were smart enough to make money, as some were; but if not, of course they had to put up with what they could get, like the rest of us; so what was the use of talking?

Then again, when that French family got sick in that rat-trap, didn't the Deacon send them over jelly and things, besides taking one of them right home with him and letting him sleep in the stable till he was well again? Yes, sir! and not many in Belle Isle would have done that much, though they would all of them have taken the rent money for the rat-trap.

Then again, this rat-trap of the Deacon's was no worse than the Red Lion and no end of such places that were full of Frenchmen and rats and mice and fleas and cockroaches and leaks and rottenness; and that brought in good rents to old John Skinner and other leading citizens, and that no one objected to. So what was the use of talking about the Deacon, *I* say, when the only

real objection to him was that he was making more money at it than the others?

Well, anyhow, it was certain that I would have amounted to something, if Dad had accepted the Deacon's offer to take me in; because Jim Cheatham, the Deacon's partner, had been taken in in precisely the same way, when Jim was no older and no smarter than I was. And now look at him! — with a house as big as the Deacon's, and nobody knew how much money, and more business perspicacity and astuteness than any man in town, except, maybe, the Deacon himself; and even he would always call on Jim when they got into a tight place; and the way Jim would snatch victory out of the jaws of defeat was a caution to cats!

For instance, the winter that Goodrich and Cheatham got stuck on about seventeen barrels of chickens that had spoiled in a spell of warm weather.

It looked for a while as if those chickens were bound to be a dead loss to the concern; because they couldn't possibly be worked off on anybody in town, as every one had turned up their noses at them, and even the ministers refused them at a sacrifice; so it looked as if there was forty dollars gone to the dogs!

People came and looked at those chickens and shook their heads and went away. For a while, there was some hopes of the new Baptist minister, whose salary would make it an object for him to invest where he could get

the most for his money; but he never even showed up, though Jim Cheatham sent round word to him by a leading parishioner, who never forgave the minister for not taking his advice; and people said it was too bad, because that first mistake of the new minister's was the beginning of his end.

But just as the Deacon had abandoned all hope and was thinking that the best he could do was to make a Christmas present of the chickens to the poor, and get what credit for benevolence there was in it, in steps Jim Cheatham and says: —



"Tell you what we'll do."

"Tell you what we'll do," says Jim. "Send 'em up to the camp and let the men eat 'em! They got good appetites," says he.

So those chickens went up to the camp where Goodrich and Cheatham's men were getting out lumber for them; and sure enough, they ate them like anything, and saved the Deacon about forty dollars' worth of pork and beans!

So it was no wonder that the Deacon set a great store by Jim and that the rest of us couldn't help admiring him, because very few would have thought of getting rid of those chickens in that way; and even Arthur Wiley had advocated feeding them to the hogs as the best way of getting them fed to *us* after a while; and nobody but Jim had the genius to feed them to the very men who were making a lot of money for him up in the woods; and we had to admit that he knew more than any of us about the secret of success.

Nobody saw it in Jim when he was running around the streets like any of us boys; but the Deacon did; and they say that this was how it happened.

They say the Deacon caught Jim hooking his apples out behind the house, when Jim was about my age. That was nothing, of course; only, Jim wasn't hooking them in the usual style, with nothing to put them in but his pockets. No, sir! Jim had brought along a good-sized hand-cart and was going to cart off the whole orchard!

Well, the minute the Deacon laid eyes on that hand-cart, he saw the business astuteness there was in it; and then he looked at Jim and saw that there was his future partner; only, he saw that Jim's genius was wasted on such small enterprises as hooking apples. So he takes Jim right into business with him on the spot; and everything that Jim had done since then had more than justified the Deacon's opinion.

At least, this is what they *say;* but I didn't believe there was much truth in it; I believe it was just a grind that they told on Jim to illustrate his business perspicacity.

And then again, it didn't look like Jim Cheatham to go after anybody's apples with nothing but a handcart! No, Jim would have wanted a four-horse team along with him, or maybe a railroad train.

So I couldn't see what possible objection Dad could have to letting the Deacon take me in and do as well by me as he had by Jim Cheatham.

Dad talked about education! But wasn't a business education the kind we needed in this country? And couldn't Jim Cheatham, with no education at all, make more money than all the college graduates in the U.S.? Well, I should say!

I never did see the beat of Dad for flying in the face of Providence, and he a minister, too!

All the same, when Hal Goodrich told me about his father's offer, and how Dad was going to educate the whole lot of us, and then snickered over it, as if it was something funny, I began to get mad, and I said to him:—

"What's the matter with Dad's educating us, if he wants to?"

"Oh, nothing," says Hal, "if he can do it."

"Well, he can," says I; "and he will, too, if he sets

out, and don't you forget it! Any fool can go into a store," says I. "That's dead easy."

"Who said they couldn't?" says Hal, beginning to get mad, himself.

"Well, then, don't be quite so funny about my Dad; because he's got as much sense as yours has, if it *don't* all run to storekeeping."

"Oh, go on!" says Hal. "We wouldn't have you in our store for a farm."

"No, you wouldn't," says I, "because you couldn't; so don't go swelling round about your little old store business. What's that amount to? Why, my father and mother are both *college graduates!*" says I.

Well, for a single instant, Hal was speechless; because he knew as well as I did that all you could rake and scrape could *never* make up for not being a college graduate; and there wasn't a single one of them in his family! It made Hal so mad to think of it, that the minute he recovered his wind, he gave his opinion of me at great length; and I just listened and took it all in, and made up my mind to let Irene know what he thought of her family. And I knew that Hal gave Kitty his opinion of ours; because the next time I saw her, she just gave me one look and passed me coldly by on the other side.

But I didn't care, and I told Irene it would be a cold, sad day for her when she married Hal Goodrich; and

I told her why; and she said she was glad I gave it to him, — as if our family wasn't as good as theirs ever thought of being. And she didn't want me to go into that store, or any of them, she said; and we'd show them whether we were hanging on to their coat-tails, or not!

And after that, Irene and Hal were out for about a month; and I was glad of it and hoped it would be permanent; but it wasn't, because Hal got over his grumps and came around and told Irene he was sorry for what he said to me; and he hadn't intended any reflection on Dad, because he considered him a very fine man, and so on.

So we had to let it go at that, of course; but I almost wished we hadn't; and while the row was on, I asked Bill Grey to come in to supper on the way home from gunning up in Mason's woods. But just as we got to the house, we saw Hal Goodrich's buggy in front of the door; and Bill said he guessed he was due at the barn.

And just then Hal came out of the house looking huffy and drove off without saying boo to either of us.

"What do you s'pose ails him now?" says I.

"Same as ails him about half the time, I guess," says Bill.

"Oh, come on in now," says I; but Bill wouldn't; and I knew it was all because Hal Goodrich's buggy

had been in front of the door. So that was what ailed *Bill*, I guess.

But he was right about Hal, just the same, because, half the time, Hal was one of the best fellows alive, and the other half he was as grumpy as Uncle Dan'l Crump. And then again, he would have pious spells that lasted a month or so, and were very hard on you while they lasted; and then he would recover from these and be himself for a while and then have a relapse, that was worse than ever.

That was Hal Goodrich all over; and, as Irene said, just as you got to liking him a little, he would have a spell come on; and then it was good-by for three months!

So there were more reasons than one why I almost wished that that row had been permanent; only, of course, Hal was Kitty's brother, and the two families had always been on good terms; and that made it awkward to keep it up forever.

And after all, I respected the Deacon for respecting me; and if Hal would only be half decent, I was willing to do the same for peace in the family, though I would rather have had Bill for a brother-in-law



CHAPTER XIII

SAM LARKER'S STUDIO

WELL, by this time, I suppose I ought to say something about my looks, though my idea is that looks don't amount to much as long as you are good at a bargain and popular with the girls.

Not that I was worrying much over most of them; but I *did* speculate some about Kitty; and for this reason, I was naturally aggravated by the pictures I had taken of me at Sam Larker's gallery, which made me out an object of pity, like McClosky after he fled to Salt Lake City and got married to forty fat wives; and Sam Larker made me look as if I was just married to fifty or sixty and had recently picked a quarrel with the whole of them.

Now, this gallery of Sam's was a one-horse affair that had come along on wheels away back in the middle of the century and got stuck in a bog off Main Street, and stayed there ever since. And next, Sam came along and got stuck in the same bog and rechristened the gallery a studio and advertised himself in both papers as an art connoisseur and an expert physi-

ognomist, till everybody was crazy to get taken before it was too late at the bargain prices offered by Sam.

I must say that my suspicions were awakened the minute I saw that word *bargain;* but Mother said that now was the time for all of us to get taken and preserved just as we were. I said that preserves were what we would probably look like; but Dad rebuked me for my scepticism, and Mother and Irene were running the thing, anyhow, so I had to give in and go with the crowd.

Sam was a tall, lanky, cheeky-looking young chap, in a check suit of clothes in which he looked about as much like an art "connisoor" as he did like the prophet Balaam. All you had to do was to cast one glance at Sam prancing down Main Street in that suit of clothes to know what kind of pictures you would get at his studio; but most people will believe a pack of lies that they read in a newspaper sooner than they will believe their senses. So every one looked at Sam's advertisement, instead of looking at him, and said: "My, how cheap for expert 'physmahogany'! Let us preserve ourselves!" and so on.

Well, our family had some daguerreotypes taken, because they were the best bargain; and of all the caricatures that ever came out of that studio, ours were a little the worst!

Mother looked like the drunkard's wife in a temper-

ance play; and Dad looked like her husband with a jag on; and Irene resembled the daughter who brings home the beer from around the corner; and Tad and



SAM PRANCING DOWN MAIN STREET.

Bonus, who were taken together, looked as sad and suffering as the two orphans after rum had done its accursed work. But the worst of all was mine! You could see that I was following in Dad's evil footsteps;

and there were a lot of freckles that had been brought out by the wind and which Sam enlarged to the size of toddy blossoms. And me with my hair plastered down like a pancake and looking uglier than sin because I'd got to have it done!

"There now, Mother, what did I tell you?" says I. "I suppose *that* was how you wanted us preserved!"

Well, the whole family nearly had a fit over those pictures. Dad just gave one look at his and left for his study; and Mother said that hers should *never* be seen on earth; and Tad burst into tears at his; and Bonus surveyed his awhile and said he wondered if that was what was designated as artistic physiognomy. And Irene laughed till she cried at the whole lot; and then she vowed that mine was a perfect likeness; and that the artist had caught me in a characteristic expression.

And that wasn't the last of it, either. A while after that, I came home one afternoon, and there were Kitty and Irene sitting in front of our open fire in the parlor, and giggling and tickling over that picture of *me!* And Kitty looked up and said, "Why, Dick, I never supposed —" and then went to giggling again.

Well, *I* never supposed, for my part, that a sister of mine would betray me in that way; and I just grabbed that thing out of Irene's clutches and threw it into the fire; but Irene rescued it in the nick of time and vowed

she was going to keep it for ever and ever and show it to all the girls; and she did.

Before that, Irene used to say that if I behaved as well as I looked, I would be all right; and I said, if she looked the way she behaved to *me*, she would stop a town clock; and the event proved that I was right.

Well, Kitty tried to patch it up by saying that they had taken some of her that were just as bad; and Bill said that those pictures did me injustice; and that they had served him the same way; and that consoled me some, because Bill was about the best-looking fellow in town; and if Sam had made a failure of him, what could I expect?

Well, that studio of Sam Larker's was one of the seven wonders of the world, and no mistake. And Sam stuck up his masterpieces, consisting of all our leading citizens, in a frame by the door where they could be seen of men; and such a rogues' gallery as they made was never seen on earth!

There were Uncle Dan'l Crump and Tub Wilkins and Arthur Wiley and L. S. Blood, and Dr. Barker and Editor Stackpole and Deacon Goodrich and Jim Cheatham, and Gerry and Fenton and Eli Teak, and Dave Nickerson (who said he was ashamed to be seen in such company), and everybody in town, nearly, except old John Skinner, who was too mean to get taken at any

[illegible] but Dad's picture was at the top, as if he were the leader of the band.

Well, when I saw that I nearly burst; but I managed to refrain some, and Dad, when I reminded me of the occasion of a gentleman and that all they wanted was a figure-head and a subject sufficient to complete the effect.

But that was how they always served you in Belle Isle whenever it was pictures or groceries or dry-goods or rum or religion or politics: it was all tarred with the same stick.

But said we must make the best of such things and do what we could to improve them: and I suppose we would; only, my idea was that the best way to go at it would be to give Sam Larker a good coat of tar and feathers; and the same to all the artists of his kind: only, if we did, the whole town would look like feather dusters in no time, and the supply of tar and feathers would give out before we were half through with the job.

I told Dad that I never saw such simple and innocent people as we had in this town; and if there was any one to lick them for it, you would hear nothing but yells from morning till night; and that *that* was the kind of preaching they'd get from me, if *I* was a minister.

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad. "You're like all boys;

and if you don't see results inside of two minutes, you get tired and quit. Look at that garden," says he. "Do you expect to get a crop out of it by just scratching it once or twice with a hoe? And people are just like that," says he. "You've got to plough 'em and harrow 'em and plant 'em and weed 'em and water 'em; and then in due time, maybe you'll see the results."

"Yes, I see 'em!" says I; "and if I was running a pig pen, and turned out such results as we've got in this town, I'd retire from the business."

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad. "Look at your Mother and me! How much result do we see yet awhile for all we've taught to you? Maybe we ought to give you up as a bad job?" says he.

Well, that was Dad — always descending to personalities when his arguments ran short. So I merely told him that of course I didn't pretend to be the credit to him that Arthur Wiley and old John Skinner and Sam Larker were; but probably, by the time I was as old as they were, he would be as proud of me as he was of them; and I tell you, that settled Dad, because he saw it was a sockdologer; and all he could say was, "Fudge, fudge," and retire in confusion to his study.

But he knew I was right, just the same; and that all the Belle Islers ever thought of, after about fifty years of ploughing and harrowing and planting and weeding,

and so on, was now to nail up each other's skins to the barn door.

But Bill and I never skinned each other; and sometimes I wondered why; because we had oceans of chances.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BOUNCER

WELL, there *was* a man in our town, and he wasn't so wondrous wise, either, because he took stock in the Golden Rule on week-days; and that man was Amsy Jenks; and we shall see what happened to *him*.

Amsy Jenks was a man that every one imposed on. Not but what he was big enough to take his own part, being upwards of seven feet high, or thereabouts; only, he was so good-natured and obliging and anxious to lend things that you could borrow his axe or his saw or his wheelbarrow or his horse or his cattle or anything that was his, and not bring it back for six months, and when you did at last, he would ask you if you were sure you were done with it.

And he and Mrs. Amsy, who was just like him, were Dad's right-hand men at church and everywhere else; and they always took a favorable view of the sermons and the way things were going, and brought us up something we would like every now and then; and the result was that Amsy's family was the worst imposed on of any family in town.

Even if Amsy caught you borrowing his apples, he wouldn't do anything about it; but Dad said, if *he* caught us borrowing any of Amsy's apples, we would get an extra dose of the stick; because any one that would hook apples from Amsy Jenks was too mean to live. All the same, you will notice a lot of that kind of people who are living in this world and beating the Golden-Rulers to a finish.

It must be nice to live by the Golden Rule, and have your axe at Brown's, and your saw at Jones's, and your wheelbarrow at Smith's, and the rest of your stuff where it will do the most good; and no doubt Amsy enjoyed it more than I would in his place.

Well, great is your reward in heaven, I suppose; but as for this earth, was Amsy loaded up with real estate and mortgages on suffering farmers? Well, not exactly. The Golden Rule doesn't reward you with such blessings as that; and hence, Amsy was blessed with a large family and a house not half as big as the Deacon's and a lot of borrowing neighbors who kept him trimmed down to lowest terms in the way of wheelbarrows and garden tools and horses and harnesses and spare cash and so on, so that it was no wonder he was so tall and thin.

And did they nominate him for congressman or any office of influence and emolument? Catch them, when they could get some sharp son of a smart Elik who

had skinned his way to affluence; and when they had found the biggest pirate of the bunch, they would say that the interests of our State and nation were safe in the hands of our honored fellow-citizen who had demonstrated his political capacity by his business astuteness.

Once they *did* happen to elect Amsy assessor by mistake; but the minute they found out he was going to treat every one alike instead of bowing down to the business interests, they got rid of him in no time.

And such, no doubt, was Dad's programme; to have us all become as easy and workable as him and Amsy, and have our skins nailed up to the barn-doors of Belle Isle.

True, Dad denies this, and says if we all of us were angels together there would be no scalps taken; and maybe there wouldn't, if ifs and ands were pots and pans. But meanwhile, with such angels as Arthur Wiley and Old John Skinner to deal with, I claimed that the less you had to do with the Golden Rule the better.

Look at Dad himself, for instance! Wasn't he forever getting into trouble by being too honest? Well, I should say! Even when we started for Belle Isle, and Dad had the chance of a lifetime to pass Bonus for nothing by simply stretching a point as to his age, he missed it as usual, and owned right up that Bonus was



a year over the limit; and it came near costing the family ten dollars; only, the ticket man was so astonished at Dad's honesty that he said, Oh, well, considering that Dad had such a tribe to transport, they would consider Bonus an infant this time.

Such a narrow escape as that ought to have been a warning to Dad; but no, he kept right on getting us into trouble by being too honest and telling the truth in the face of Providence. And he kept aiding and abetting Amsy in the same proceedings till the two of them looked like lambs led to the slaughter.

But as for Bill and me, we discussed the problem over a fresh supply of old Bugbee's apples at Gerry's board pile, and decided that the Golden Rule was not for this world; and to prove it beyond peradventure, as Dad says, I told Bill the following tale of my artless childhood, when heaven was still hanging around me, in the words of the poet:—

"Well, Bill," says I, "it was this way. You see, Dad had gone off to exchange with another minister, and I was glad of it; because we always had an extra good dinner at such times for the minister, whoever he was, that was staying at our house; and Dad always had just as good a dinner, wherever he went, so *that* was all right.

"Well, this particular Sunday, Bill, the dinner was particularly good; and Mother was looking particu-

larly pleased, because we children were behaving particularly nice; and to wind up with, there was a big dish of oranges with a bouncer on top which Tad and Emerson and Irene and I all eyed with a wishful eye.

"Well, with bated breath we watched Mother take that bouncer off the pile and put it on a plate; and then we could contain ourselves no longer, and we all of us up and shouted with one voice, 'I speak for the bouncer!'

"Well, as I spoke first, I ought to have got it; but did I? Not on your life I didn't, not while Mother was running things. Speechless with indignation, she takes that bouncer and planks it down in front of the minister, who had done nothing to deserve it, and who, realizing this, or something, takes the bouncer and planks it down in front of the most deserving one of the bunch."

"Which one was that?" says Bill, interrupting.

"He stands before you," says I.

"Thought so," says Bill. "Proceed." And I proceeded.

"But alas, Bill, it was no use. Mother wouldn't let me keep it, and the minister *had* to eat it, if it choked him to death, which, I am happy to say, it pretty near did.

"Well, you better believe, Bill, that after he was gone there was something to pay; and Mother threat-

ened to inform Dad, with awful results in prospect for me and Iyee Wowo, because we were the ringleaders of the late cataclysm. But at last Mother relented so far as to let us off with a long lecture full of moral chestnuts, such as are only one remove from a licking; and even then, you don't know which you would rather take. 'Didn't I always tell you,' says she, 'that it was better to give than to receive; and wasn't that in the last Sunday School lesson? And yet, the minute you had a chance to put it in practice, you must go behaving like a lot of little pigs, right before the minister!'

"'Well, now, Mother,' says I, 'how can you expect us to get a thing like that the first time without any previous practice? But just you give us another chance, and see how nice we'll give up the bouncer to others, no matter how bad we want it ourselves.'

"'Well,' says Mother, 'we'll try it. Here is another bouncer which I was keeping for the one that behaved the best. Now let's see which of you two will give it up to the other.'"

"Well, Bill, I took that bouncer and looked it all over, knowing that I should never see it again, and then, holding it out to Iyee Wowo, and turning away my eyes from temptation, I said, 'Here, sister, you may have it.'

"'No, brother, you may have it,' says she, handing it sweetly, but wishfully, back.

"'No, sister, you may have it,' says I, nobly.

"'Thank you, brother,' says she.

"Well, I looked at that bouncer, and at Iyee Wowo in calm, triumphant possession of it, and realized too late that once more had she been too smart for me, as with a breaking heart I sobbed, 'The next time, *I* was going to say thank you!'

"So there you are, Bill," says I; "and that is how the Golden Rule always works. The noblest and best will always be the one to get left, and the smartest and piggishest will always be the one to say thank you."

Well, I told that story to Bill, trusting, among other things, to give him a side-light on Iyee Wowo and lead him to suspect that maybe she was human after all, and not so angelic as to discourage all hope; and Bill never saw the point, of course, and merely remarked that he didn't see why children should be expected to live up to things that grown-ups wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole.

"Every one in this town is grabbing for the bouncer day and night," says Bill; "and the one that gets it has every one else licking dirt off of his boots."

And then I said, "Bill," says I, "if there's any such thing as God's truth, you've said it!"

Now, if this doesn't prove that the Golden Rule is not for this world, what does it prove?

CHAPTER XV

THE FELL DESTROYER

WHILE Dad was battling with sin in the pulpit, the rest of us were doing what we could with temperance meetings at Goodrich's Hall, the same place where our church held services. About everything was held in Goodrich's Hall, — church and temperance meetings and dances and theatricals and church fairs and county fairs, and so on.

Dad and Elder Pritchard stood shoulder to shoulder on temperance, which was a great concession from Elder Pritchard; because, when we first came to Belle Isle, Elder Pritchard gave out that Dad would go to the nether regions *sure*, for preaching the Golden Rule instead of fire and brimstone. But one night, Dad showed them what he could do on the temperance platform when he turned himself loose; and wound up with, "If there is no one else to complain in free Belle Isle, *I* will complain!"

It was an eloquent passage, they said; but all the same, Dad had to suffer for it after he got home; because, after that, when anything went wrong in the

family, some of us would up and spout, "If no one else will complain in free Belle Isle, *I* will complain!" And then Dad would leave for his study.

But it suited Elder Pritchard, though, because that was the style he was brought up on; so after that, he got down off his high theological horse and shook hands with Dad, and said afterwards that maybe the Golden Rule wouldn't do any particular harm, though fire and brimstone was what we needed.

And that was the way with old Elder Pritchard — good-hearted as anything; but so 'way behind the times that he sounded like your great-grandmother, every time he opened his mouth. All the same, he had the biggest congregation in town, because the farther behind the times you get, the more people there are to keep you company.

One time at a temperance meeting, Elder Pritchard told the story of Washington's little hatchet, which was the newest thing he knew; and the people nearly had a fit. And that was about as near up-to-date as Elder Pritchard ever got. He used to give them sermons that Noah preached to the animals in the ark; and he could prove from the Bible that only about one in four millions would be saved; and that was one too many, he said, judging by the way things were going in Belle Isle.

It reminded you of old John Burns at Gettysburg

to see old Elder Pritchard blazing away at them with his old flint-lock musket that would only carry about half a mile, while they just stood off and peppered him with repeating rifles at two miles and a half away. And yet, there stood old Elder Pritchard with his old flint-lock musket, fire and brimstone, firing away at them, and never hitting a Belle Isler once in two years!

At first you wanted to laugh at the Elder; but when you saw what an up-hill fight he was making, your sympathies were with him; and you wished he would get himself an up-to-date Springfield rifle, as it were; only, it would have been no use to offer him one, because he wouldn't have taken it as a gift. And even if he *had*, he'd have had his hands full, just the same.

There was Dad, for instance, with a whole battery of Gatling guns, such as Anthropology and Biology, and Metaphysics and Evolution and Higher Criticism, and all the rapid-fire machinery there was going, to say nothing of the Golden Rule, which was his favorite weapon; and yet, he had all *he* could do to hold his own.

Of course, our people were proud of Dad's outfit; and they said they liked to see a minister with an up-to-date equipment; and sometimes, when Dad got all the artillery to going at once, you'd think a thunder storm had broke loose in Goodrich's Hall; and people would go away and say it was grand. All the same,

you had to look out what kind of bargains they gave you next day. For instance, one Sunday, Dad preached on: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels," and Monday morning, they sent us up two dozen of the worst eggs that were ever laid in Belle Isle.

Well, those temperance meetings were exciting, as everybody took a hand, one way or another; and they would get Kitty and Hal and Irene and me to sing temperance quartettes like: —

"Bring home your money to night!
Oh bring home your mone-e-e to-night, to-o-o-night!"
For you know, Father dear, that we all must be fed,
So bring home your mone-e-e-e to-o-o-o-night."

It was a sad song, like all of them; and one time I tried to liven this one up a little by singing it —

"For you know, Father dear, that we all must have beer"

(which was considerably nearer the truth in Belle Isle). Of course, nobody heard it but Kitty and Irene and Hal; and Irene gave me a look that pretty nearly finished me; and Kitty turned red up to the roots of her hair and Hal looked so fearfully pious that you'd have thought he had the stomach ache, or something. But Hal always did have those pious spells, just like his father.

Well, I didn't care much, because it made me sick

to sing that kind of songs. But the sickest things were the recitations that the girls used to recite about drunkards, and so on.

Mildred used to have a piece about —

"Tell me I hate the bowl?
Hate is a fee-bull word.
I loath, ab-haw!
Me ver-re-e soul with strong dis*gust* is stirred,
Whenair-rrre I speak or heah or tell
Of that dahk beverage of hell!"

Oh, it was awful, and made you sweat clear down your back, the way girls always do when they recite.

And Tommy Dodge could sing, "No more brown jugs for me," and other songs, telling how he was done with rum, but saying nothing about butter and eggs. "No more old eggs for me," would have suited me just as well, considering that our family were suffering more from eggs than we were from rum.

Well, those meetings were exciting, and no mistake. Once we had a debate between our leading citizens about "What shall we regard as evidence of selling rum." And Editor Stackpole got up and said it was ridiculous the way this talk about rum selling went flying about! "Why," says he, "I have even heard that it was sold *right under this very hall!*" And then he sat down.

Well, when Deacon Goodrich heard *that*, he knew what Editor Stackpole was up to, because the Deacon's

store was right under that very hall; and the Deacon jumps up with a face as red as a lobster and thunders out, so that the windows rattled: —

"Who says I sell rum?"

"Oh, nobody in particular," says Editor Stackpole, looking comfortable and satisfied with the dig he'd got at the Deacon. "I just heard it flying around, that's all; and I just mentioned it because it was so ridiculous."

But this didn't satisfy the Deacon, by a jugful. He and old Stackpole were enemies from 'way back, and the Deacon knew what old Stack was up to, so he bellows out like a bull of Bashan: "Here is a man who says I sell rum and who cannot bring one iota of evidence to prove it! I denounce this man as a liar and a slanderer and a horse thief and a perjurer and a humbug and a quack and a blackguard and —"

I forget what else; but the Deacon went on with a long string of names and kept piling up the adjectives, till the chairman had to call him to order; and at last the Deacon sat down, sweating and stewing; and the chairman said, if there were no more remarks, we would close the meeting by all singing, "We never will drink any more."

But I didn't blame the Deacon much, because every one knew what old Stackpole was up to; besides, nobody believed the Deacon sold rum, though maybe Jim Cheat-

ham had a bottle or two around in case of sickness; but that was nothing, because every one did the same.

So that was the exciting kind of times we had at temperance meetings; and it was no wonder that they were popular. Sometimes people acted as if they'd been taking too much, or something; and Mother said, for her part, she thought they might as well get drunk on rum as get drunk on temperance. It seemed as if they were bound to get drunk, anyhow. (But she didn't say this at the meeting, mind you. She waited till she got home.) And Dad said he was sorry for what happened that night; and after this, maybe it would be better to have some professional lecturers that understood the business better than we did.

So after that, we had a long string of them, one after the other. Every winter those temperance orators came along and told us that all the evils of this life sprung from rum, the fell destroyer, blighter of our peace, wrecker of our homes, slayer of our youth in its fairest prime. That was the way they put her through. And they said, all we had to do in Belle Isle was to let rum alone and then watch our wings begin to sprout. They said rum was a temptation that nobody could resist without summoning up all his manhood, and resolving never to touch another drop; because even the angels, if they should get a smell of it, would want to plunge right down out of heaven, and drink them-



selves into bestial insensibility. The orators said they'd tried resisting it, and failed, over and over; and they didn't know how soon they'd be drunk again; but if any one was to ask 'em to take a drink, they'd strike him dead.

It was pretty impressive to Bill and me, to think there was anything that tasted as good as all that; and it just made us thirsty to hear those lecturers go on. So we both of us signed a pledge, because we could feel the first symptoms coming on, and we knew our only chance was to take it in time and stave off the tempter with a sense of high moral obligation.

After I'd signed, I thought that was the end of it; but the symptoms kept getting worse and worse, and I never felt so thirsty in my life; and Bill said he felt the same. Bill said that he drank rum in his dreams; and by and by so did I; and once I dreamed I was standing in rum up to my neck and trying to drink it dry. The lecturer said it always came on that way, and got worse and worse till you yielded to your fate.

And when Charlie Taggart recited: —

"Rrrrrogah's me dahg!" and came to the place where it says

> "I'd sell out heav-en for something wahm,
> To stop a horrrible, inwahd sink-ing!" —

Bill and I nudged each other, as much as to say that that was just it.



I asked Bill if he'd ever drunk any rum; and he said, no, but he'd like to, just to see how it tasted.

Then I said I wondered if we could get some rum anywhere; and Bill said it would be hard work, because it was mostly all drunk up the minute it got into town.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRUTH ABOUT RUM

AWHILE after that, Bill stayed after school to help me do up the chores on the old Academy building; and when it was all done, Bill got out a pint bottle about half full of something the color of varnish, and showed it to me.

"What's that?" says I.

"Rum!" says Bill.

"Where'd you get it?"

"Hooked it out of Dan McQueery's coat pocket down at the shop."

"Wonder what it tastes like?"

"Try it," says Bill, with a peculiar look in his eye.

Well, I saw by that look that Bill had tried it himself, and still lived. Besides, what was the use? If rum was all they said it was, how could they expect us to resist it forever, when even the angels felt so bad because they couldn't get a drink? Bill had already given in for one; and as for me — well, I saw that my time was come. All the evil passions that the lecturer had told us about began flaring up inside of me, and I decided to let her go.

So I tipped up the bottle and took a good swig for a starter; and the next minute I ran for the wood-box and spit out all I could of it, and said a word that Dave Nickerson taught me.

"How do you like it?" says Bill, with that same peculiar look in his eye.

"I'll pay you off for this," says I. "That's no rum — nothing but turpentine or something."

"Turpentine nothing. It's rum," says Bill. "I saw Dan McQueery take a big drink of it and smack his lips and say it was good stuff; and he was madder than hops when he found it was gone."

Well, I could hardly believe Bill at first, but he gave me so much evidence that at last I believed him, and said: "Well, so that's rum? Well, Bill, of all the swindles!"

"Yes," says Bill, "that's just what it is. And that's what they've been warning us against all this while, and making our mouths water so we could hardly wait to get a drink!"

"Of all the frauds, don't this beat the Dutch?" says I; and Bill agreed with me.

We were both of us so mad to think of how we'd been imposed upon by those temperance people, that we just fairly longed to get even one way or another; and by and by we found a way.

Every now and then, when they ran out of professional

orators, they would propose that some of our younger members should bear witness to the beneficent effects of temperance; so Bill and I decided that now was our time to bear witness and give 'em the benefit of our experience with the drink devil.

We worked that lecture up between us in school hours when young Atwell thought we were getting out Cæsar and Mathematics; and he praised us for our diligence, and said he wished there were more like us; and when we got it done, Bill said he dasn't read it at the temperance meeting for fear of what they'd do to him at home; and I didn't know what they'd do to me, either; but we were both of us bound to let them have it; and so we tossed up a cent to see which of us had got to read it. Heads was for Bill and tails was for me, and it came down tails. So I said, all right, I'd read it, if they half killed me afterwards.

There was a big crowd out at Goodrich Hall that night; and Kitty and Irene and Hal Goodrich and Sam Gerry and Eli Teak and Bill Grey and Tommy Dodge and his sister Alice (who was awfully pretty, but older than I was); and Charlie Taggart (who was sweet on Alice, and could act the tragedy parts in plays better than anyone, if you liked that kind of thing, but I didn't); and Dad and Mother and Tad and Bonus and Deacon Goodrich and his wife, and L. S. Blood and his wife and his son John; and Dr. Barker and his wife, and Lawyer

Pinkham and his wife; and old John Skinner and young John, who was a bigger skinner than his father; and the whole Gerry family, and Elder Pritchard and Sid Grey, Bill's big brother, who could skate like anything; and Sid Coville, who made a lot of money diving under the sea, and had tied the knot on Jim Cullom when they lynched him, folks said; and pretty nearly every one in town was there; and I tell you, I was scared blue!

But there were John Bowles and Bob Leighton and Charlie Barlow and the Jenks boys, who cut up enough to make up for Amsy's virtue, and a lot of other fellows with sticks and shingles to lead the applause with when the time came, and that cheered me up some. Besides, Tommy Dodge had to sing his song about "No more brown jugs for me," by request; and then I was afraid Mildred was going to give us "Tell me I hate the bowl" again; but it was worse than that, because they turned on Charlie Taggart with his star piece, which was a hair-raiser of the worst kind; and this was how Charlie gave it to us: —

"We are two trahvellahs, Rrrrrogah and ahee,
Rrrrrogah's me dahg. Come heah, you scahmp.
Jump for the gentlemen! Mind youah ahee!
Ovah the table! Look out for the lahmp!
The rrrrogue is grrrowing a little old.
Five yee-ahs we've trahmped through wind ahnd weathah,
Ahnd slept out doahs when nights were cold,
Ahnd ate ahnd drrrank ahnd *stahved* togethah!"

And so on, just like that, which was Charlie's style of execution which he had learned at Bangor; and that night he piled on the agony as never before, till you felt your collar melting slowly away in the perspiration that was oozing from your pores. But Charlie was a good fellow, and I was glad he selected that piece; because I said to myself, if they could stand that, they could stand anything.

That piece of Charlie's encouraged me; and so, by the time he got the drunkard killed, I went up on the platform as bold as brass, and gave them the title of the piece good and loud, so that every one could hear it.

"THE TRUTH ABOUT RUM"

Just the title seemed to start the boys off, somehow, and they kept the sticks and shingles a-going every chance they got, so that as the "Star" said in its report, "The young lecturer delivered his address in the midst of a tempest of applause," which was about it.

"You'd scarce expect one of my age," says I, "to speak in public on the stage on such an important subject as rum, especially to people that know so much more about it than I do.

"Never having drunk as much rum as I ought to, in order to be able to talk about the drink habit, these few remarks may not do as much good as they would if they

came from a reformed drunkard or one of our leading citizens."



"THE YOUNG LECTURER."

(Along about here, the boys went crazy, and kept it up all through the piece.)

"Rum," says I, "has been called the tempter, and so I suppose it is, to some people; and so is dead horse, to kites and crows.

"Every one says that rum is so irresistible that if you get one taste of it, you're a goner.

"Now *I* say, if rum is irresistible, so is bug poison; and any man that would drink rum would drink ditch water and smack his lips.

"The truth about rum is, it takes a man about fifteen years to learn to like it; and even then, he'd get discouraged and quit, if it wasn't for temperance lecturers to whet up his appetite.

"If I was a rumseller, I'd hire that kind of lecturer to go round and lecture for me, because it always makes you so crazy for a drink.

"These temperance lecturers think they are smart; but the truth is, they don't know their business, or they wouldn't be cracking up rum so high that everybody's bound to get a drink, just to see what it tastes like. To hear them talk, you'd think the Angel Gabriel would sell his trumpet for a pint of forty-rod, if it wasn't for the looks of it; which shows how much more they know about rum than they do about angels.

"The first thing to do for temperance is to kill off a lot of these lecturers that go around telling how nice rum tastes. Maybe it *does* to *them;* and rats taste nice to cats; and dead horse tastes nice to crows; and anybody that likes rum would like anything that was rotten enough.

"If any one had as much sense as a cow or a calf,

or a yellow dog or a billy goat, or a mule or a pig or a tom-cat, there wouldn't be any call for champion liars to come along and tell us how nice rum tastes, and how full they used to get on it before they reformed, and how we've all of us got to get full unless we sign — sign, to-night.

"The orators all say, if it wasn't for rum, we would be a virtuous people; but my idea is that it's just the other way. If we were a virtuous people, we wouldn't want to wade in rum up to our necks, especially after we knew what it was made of.

"I signed a pledge, once, not to drink any more rum; and next, I suppose they'll want me to swear off on castor oil and soft soap, and a lot of other temptations. It beats all, the way this town is tempted by things that would make a jackass turn up his toes.

"I'm never going to sign any more pledges not to drink essence of old bootleg, not if I know it; and as for these boozers that want it so bad, if I was the temperance people, I'd shut 'em up somewhere, and just pour the stuff into 'em; and I'll bet you, in less than no time, they'd beg for mercy."

There was more of the piece, but I thought I'd better stop about this place, before the boys raised the roof off the hall; so I just made 'em a low bow, and got out as quick as I could.

And then Deacon Goodrich, who was presiding, had

to call the meeting to order; and Editor Stackpole got up and tried to prove that rum *was* a tempter, anyhow; but it was no use; the boys just howled him down and laughed and whistled so that they had to close with, "We never will drink any more," and go home.

Well, the temperance ladies looked pretty sick, some of 'em, as if it was all up with rum from now on, and "Othello's occupation was gone," as the poet says. And Dr. Barker and old Mr. Gerry just sat and shook like bowls of jelly on a plate; and Deacon Goodrich looked at me with a funny little twinkle in his eye, as if that had hit *him* about right; and Kitty looked scared, as if she would never have thought I would do such a thing. But I didn't care, because somehow I just *wanted* to scare Kitty that way.

Those who didn't like the piece said, "What could you expect of a minister's son?" Which meant that minister's sons are expected to be the kind of goody-goody angels that agree with all the fools in town and never do anything to make old maids throw up their hands and faint away!

And Mother gave me a talking to on the way home about pitching into the people like that; and Irene said she wouldn't be so smart if she could; and anyhow, she'd bet that Bill Grey wrote the whole piece.

"No, he didn't either, Iyee Wowo!" says I. "He only wrote about half of it."

And Dad screwed up his face and said he'd like to know how I came to know as much as all that at fifteen years old.

"What's that got to do with it?" says I. "Can't a fellow know anything at fifteen years old?"

And Dad said, Oh, yes, that was just the time you knew everything.

So that's all the good it does to tell the truth to people, especially your own family.

I tell you, it did me good, though, when Dr. Barker came up the next day and wanted to see me, and said before them all: —

"Dick, would it be possible to secure your recent reform effort for publication in the 'Star'?"

And I said, I guessed it would.

"Only, Doctor," says I, "Bill Grey's got to bear half of the blame of it, because he wrote half of the piece."

The Doctor said he'd attend to that all right; so he put it in the way I told him to: —

"THE TRUTH ABOUT RUM
by
RICHARD BRINSLEY NEWMAN
and
WILLIAM TECUMSEH GREY"

And the Doctor cracked it 'way up in an editorial on "New Light on the Temperance Question," and said:

"Our gifted young fellow-citizens have pointed out a fact that seems to have escaped the general observation; namely, that rum as a temptation has been somewhat overadvertised, to the detriment of temperance itself. For our part," says the Doctor, "we have experienced a pronounced diminution of thirst since hearing the truth about rum as viewed by Mr. Newman and Mr. Grey; and we are led to suspect that the inherent temptations of rum are less to blame than the pure cussedness of those who drink it."

Which was exactly my idea and Bill's.

But this didn't suit Editor Stackpole, who came out in the "Sunrise" with a long editorial in this style: —

"Is it thus that the cause of temperance is trifled with by our frivolous contemporary, the 'Star,' whose columns appear to be open to every bantling effusion? That rum *is* a temptation, the editor of the 'Star' is well aware from personal experience; and *never* will this curse be removed from our midst until it is treated seriously, and not in the frivolous and contemptible manner of which the 'Star' is a standing illustration."

Well, of course that suited the temperance people about right, because they seemed to have figured it out that if every one got disgusted with rum and quit drinking, it would be all up with the temperance cause. So they sent for a star performer from Bangor to come up and treat rum seriously and put it back on the list of

temptations. And he came and saw and conquered, and said it was all well enough for those who had never realized the power of the tempter to make light of it; but those who, like him, had been the victims of a thirst that it would take the Atlantic Ocean full of rum to quench, were the only ones who could speak with authority of the drink demon. And then he described all the drinks he ever had drunk and how they got the best of him, and how bad he wanted 'em all the while, till I was disgusted to think of such a hog as that coming to tell us we were all just like him.

And I tell you, rum was respected after that; and every one wanted some worse than ever; and Editor Stackpole said the temperance cause was saved!

And to think they paid good money for all that nincompoopery, and Bill and I never got a cent! But we were right, just the same; and Dave Nickerson said so, and he ought to know.

"You boys just hit the nail on the head," says Dave. "Lordy!" says he. "*I* don't have to drink rum, no more'n you do; I just drink it out of pure cussedness; and that's the way with the whole pack of 'em. 'Tain't no temptation at all, 'cept to them that's lookin' for it; and I'm one of that kind, and so's all the rest of 'em in this town; and s'long as that's the way of it, they're bound to keep on loadin' up with rum, or any blank thing they can git holt of," says Dave.

CHAPTER XVII

THE "DISHRAG" FAMILY

WELL, after that last orator left town, everybody's thirst got so bad that they decided it was about time to persecute somebody for selling them the stuff.

So they looked round a while to find somebody that it would be safe to touch, till at last they pitched on old Dishong, who lived in a little log house down below the dam, and whose son Tweenish Dishong played on our baseball nine, and was called Dishrag for short, so that after a while the name stuck to the whole family.

And this was how they came to pitch on the Dishrags.

Bill and I and Charlie Barlow, whose father ran the sawmill, had made a raft just below the dam, and put our guns on it to go downstream and shoot ducks. I had a new gun that I owned on shares with Tommy Dodge and kept down at his house, for fear Mother would find out about it; and I tell you I was careful of that gun. So I laid it down in the middle of the raft, where it would keep dry, and Bill and Charlie and I all got on and started out.

Well, the stream was pretty swift, because this was along in the spring; and just as we got down opposite the Red Lion where all the Frenchmen lived that could get into it, the raft struck a rock about six inches below the surface, and the old thing keeled over and pitched us out into the stream.

Well, we waded ashore pretty wet and mad; and there was my gun in the bottom of the stream somewhere, and a whole crowd of Frenchmen standing around laughing and jabbering their "sacrees," and all that.

We all of us hunted for the gun till we were wet up to our necks, and at last I told Tweenish Dishong that I'd give him, or any one, a dollar for finding that gun. So the Frenchmen all waded in after it, and Bill and Charlie and I started for home.

Well, when we got to the top of the bank, there was a big row going on in front of old Dishrag's little log cabin, between old Dishrag and his wife and six or seven little Dishrags on one side, and old Twitchell, the tax-gatherer, on the other.

Old Twitchell was one of these smart Eliks that they always get for that kind of a job; and he always took a high and mighty tone to the Frenchmen, or any one of that size, and then lay down before the Deacon or Tub Wilkins, or L. S. Blood, or any of the big ones, and wallowed on his marrow-bones; and that was why they had *him*, I guess.

Now, this Dishrag house was a little old log cabin that had been there since the year one, and nearly tumbled to pieces, till the Dishrags got hold of it and fixed it up for themselves with slabs and shingles that they fished out of the river; and there they lived without paying any rent (though old John Skinner tried to make out that the property belonged to him, and failed; because Amsy Jenks sat on the case and said that old John ought to be tarred and feathered for bringing such a suit; and the whole court-room cheered him and said they had half a mind to do it; and that discouraged old John, especially as he had to pay costs and so on).

So after that, nobody disturbed the Dishrags till old Twitchell got elected tax-collector; and *he* began to talk big and tell how he was going to get every dollar that was due this town, or bust.

So he began on the little ones, of course, and let the big ones off easy; and the first one he pitches on is the Dishrag family and their little old shanty that wasn't worth a cord of slab wood which you could get for nothing if you would haul it away. And old Twitchell appraised the Dishrag shanty at about fifty times what it was worth, and made out the bill at par, and started in to collect it with a club.

Well, old Dishrag was bound he wouldn't pay that tax bill; and I didn't blame him, because he hadn't a thing inside of his house but an old ruin of a stove

to fry buckwheat plugs on; and the way they fried them was appetizing.

They just greased the stove lids with a piece of salt pork that had descended in the family, and then poured on the plugs; and that was all there was to it, except eating them.

And Tweenish Dishrag would snare rabbits up in the woods and bring them home to eat and make ear-laps and so on out of their fur to keep the children from freezing. And old Mrs. Dishrag did washing for people, and old Dishrag sawed wood, and that was about all they had to live on, except, maybe, a little rum that they sold; and *that* business was so overdone in Belle Isle that there wasn't much money in it, unless you had a store on Main Street, or kept a hotel.

So there was old Twitchell and the Dishrags having it out about the tax bill when we came up the bank.

"*Sacree!*" says old Dishrag. "How I pay you de tox if I got no darshong?"

"Look a-here, Dishong," says old Twitchell, "you got to pay that tax, darshong or no darshong! Your wife makes money washin' and you make it sawin' wood and sellin' rum, too, they say; and you got to pay that tax, or I'll know the reason why."

Well, then, Dishrag got mad all of a sudden, the way Frenchmen do, and says he: "I leef here in dees little

dam' house and saw your dam' wood for notting and you kom to me for tox! I geef you tox!"

And then, old Dishrag, who wasn't more than two-thirds the size of old Twitchell, sailed into him with the



STREAKED IT FOR HOME.

whole family to help, young ones and all; and the way they hustled him down the bank of that river was worth a quarter to look at! My, but the air was full of sacrees and damns! And Bill and Charlie and I just stood by and cheered for the Dishrags and waited to see old

Twitchell get his ducking, which he deserved more than any man in Belle Isle; but just as they got him to the edge of the water, old Twitchell managed to break loose and streaked it for home like a scared cat. It was awfully disappointing, but it was fun to see him run.

Well, of course, old Twitchell swore he would be revenged and talked big about arresting them blanked Frenchmen for assault and battery; but the Dishrag tribe said they'd throw any one into the river that tried to arrest 'em; and all the Frenchmen in the Red Lion said, sacree, they'd help 'em do it. Besides, nobody cared about old Twitchell, anyhow, whether he got ducked or not, and even the temperance people were ashamed of him when he popped up at the next meeting and said he was a teetotaler from now on.

"And why, feller-citizens?" says he; "why am I a teetotaler? Because of my narrow escape from a watery grave at the hands of inebriated men. What was it, feller-citizens, that caused them Frenchmen to lift their profane hands against the sacred person of a official of this town in the performance of his sacred duty? Rum, feller-citizens, rum, the fell destroyer; and I guess you'd 'a' said so if you'd 'a' smelt of their breaths! When them infuriated Frenchmen was about to hurl *me* into the ragin' waters of the Belle Isle stream, *then*, feller-citizens, I appreciated as *never* before *the evils of intemperance!*"

Then the boys all broke loose and hooted and whistled and laughed and cat-called till you couldn't hear yourself think; and that made old Twitchell madder than ever.

So he swore out a complaint against old Dishrag for selling rum, and got him hauled up before the court.

Well, first they brought the case before Amsy Jenks, who was Justice of the Peace, and who said he *had* to decide according to law and evidence; but he was ashamed to do it, because it looked to him like a clear case of persecution, in view of the fact that so many camels were going scot-free, and that the suit had been brought from motives of revenge; and so he would make the fine one cent without costs.

Then old Twitchell was madder than ever, and a lot of other fools along with him, because they said that the cause of temperance had been betrayed in the house of its friends. So they got old Dishrag arrested on another count and tried before another Justice (because they never went twice to Amsy Jenks if they wanted injustice done); and the result was that old Dishrag was convicted and sent up to Holton Jail for one year, leaving his family to root hog or die.

Every one that was half decent said that it was a little the meanest thing that ever happened in Belle Isle; and Dad said it was a disgrace to the cause of temperance. "Why didn't they arrest old Tub Wilkins, who

was selling barrels of it to the drummers and any one that came along?" says Dad. "And there's a dozen just like him that every one knows about, and no one touches; and we swallow those camels and strain out this wretched gnat of a poor ignorant Frenchman," says Dad.

And Mother cried, and the ladies took on about it and got mad at the men; and everybody accused everybody else of being a coward and a sneak and a jackass and a cur dog and so on, and it was most of it true.

And the "Star" and the "Sunrise" had it back and forth; and the "Star" said that this sort of thing was what we might expect from the teachings of that absurd misnomer and pander to power, the "Sunrise"; and the "Sunrise" said that the "Star" was a blatant demagogue and a friend of Anarchy and social disruption, such as was rearing its head in our midst.

And then Dad got on his war horse and pranced into Goodrich Hall with a red-hot sermon on gnats and camels, in which he ripped the skins off all the camels in town and hung them up to dry.

And some got mad at the sermon and said they were tired of hearing all the time about justice and mercy and love and character and truth and purity and righteousness and brotherhood and all that. And Mother said she'd like to know what there was left to preach about but fire and brimstone, and they were tired of that too.

"That's all right, Mother," says I. "There's just two things that some people never get tired of, and that's rum and pure cussedness. The thing for Dad to do is when the temperance business is on, give 'em something about the glory of the Junetime; and when it's politics they're up to, you want to talk about the Mosaic cosmogony; and when business is rampant, then's the time to turn on the sweet by and by; and everybody'll be delighted, especially the old Nick."

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad. "You leave this preaching business to me, and don't be so smart. The people are all right, only they've got a lot to learn. And you too, sir!" says Dad. "You too. The fact is," says he, "there's too many of these smart, fifteen-year-old boys running things; and that's just what ails this town."

Well, I didn't know exactly what Dad meant by that. *I* didn't see any fifteen-year-old boys running things. Seems to me, the ones that were running things were those camels that Dad told about in his sermon; and I noticed they kept right on running them as usual, especially the rum business; and nobody touched them or sent them up to Holton Jail. And the Dishrag family got on any way they could with what the ladies carried to them on the sly.

Poor old Dishrag! It made me sick to think of him spending that year in Holton Jail; and then to see old

Tub Wilkins strutting up and down his hotel platform with a hump on the front of him as big as two camels, and barrels and barrels of rum for the drummers and leading citizens.

But that was always the way in our town, and Eli Teak said so to Bill and me.

"The meshes of the law always open up wide to let the big ones through," says Eli, "and then close up tighter than a drum to catch the little ones; and that's why *I* say there's no such thing as justice in Belle Isle."

Well, anyhow, I was glad that Tweenish Dishrag found that gun and got the dollar, because I guess the Dishrags needed it to set them up in the rum business. And people said that old Mrs. Dishrag had to sell more rum than ever, that year, to support the family; and Dave Nickerson said he always patronized 'em, because he believed in doing all the good you could without hurting yourself.

CHAPTER XVIII

MY FIRST CAMPAIGN

WE had an awful time over politics that fall, because it was a presidential year, and the "Sunrise" said there was danger of the country being betrayed into the hands of its enemies, unless all patriotic citizens voted right, and did their best to foil the machinations of the malignant conspiracy which was championed by the "Star."

And L. S. Blood came around with a copy of the "Sunrise," which he held to be more infallible than the Bible, and showed it to Dad and said he'd advise him as a true friend in a private and confidential way not to have anything to say about politics in the pulpit, because it would be apt to make trouble. And Dad said, hum, he'd see about it. Maybe there wouldn't be any need of his saying anything, and then again, maybe there would; anyhow, he couldn't make any promises.

And L. S. said that was all right; only, you could see by the papers it was going to be a warm campaign, and he thought somebody ought to put Dad on his guard.

And Dad said that was all right; and it was very kind

of Mr. Blood to take so much trouble. You didn't scare Dad much with that kind of bluff; and the minute you advised him to keep still about anything, like as not he'd think it was his duty to take that for his subject next Sunday.

After L. S. was gone I looked the paper over and asked Dad how the "Sunrise" came to own the whole country.

"Oh, well," says Dad, "I suppose Editor Stackpole is getting sort of old and infallible, and so on; but we mustn't mind *him*, because there's all kinds of politics in our church," says Dad. "Some are Republicans and some are Democrats and some are Greenbackers, and so on."

"You're a Republican, aren't you, Dad?" says I.

Dad said he'd always voted that way, but he didn't know how he should vote this year.

"Well, what's L. S. Blood?" says I.

Dad hemmed and hawed, and at last he owned up that L. S. was a Republican, too.

"Well, what's Arthur Wiley?"

"He's a Democrat," says Dad, as if that explained Arthur all right.

"Well, then, I'm a Greenbacker," says I. "Because, any party that don't suit those two will be sure to suit me."

Dad said fudge, fudge; there were good men in all parties; but I told him I'd bet the Greenbackers had the

most of 'em; and anyhow, we needed more greenbacks in this town, so those good men could pay Dad his salary in spot cash.

"Fudge, fudge," says Dad, "you don't understand these things."

"Maybe not, Dad," says I; "but I understand it's awful hard work to collect your salary, even after you've earned it twice over; and if that don't prove that we need more greenbacks, what does it prove?"

Dad said there were a lot of things besides greenbacks that were needed in this town; but that was dodging the issue; so I told Dad he could vote any way he liked; but as for me, I was going to vote the Greenback ticket and use my influence the same way.

Dad said maybe my influence would carry the election; but my vote wouldn't amount to much till I was twenty-one; which is the mean way that grown men have of crowing over you because they are older than you are — as if that was anything to brag of!

If I made Tad and Emerson stand around, Dad would say, "Look here, you've no right to bully your little brothers, just because you are bigger than they are;" but when it came to him and me, *that* was different.

Well, there are some fellows who think they have got to vote just like their dads; but I would despise myself if I was one of that kind; so I told Dad it was no use to

talk; his political affiliations were one thing and mine were another, and we would leave the great American people to decide which of us was right.

From that time on, a string of spell-binders came down like the wolf on the fold and blew themselves up full of wind, and told how they loved their country, till it made you sick. I thought I loved my country some before I heard those spell-binders, but after that, I saw my mistake; and as they roared and bellowed like bulls of Bashan, and sweat and sawed the air and swallowed more water, and with one impassioned palm under their coat-tails and the other flapping at high heaven, while they piled on the agony and told of their burning, sizzling love for Old Glory, I saw how feeble anything I had ever felt was compared to this!

Well, the more I heard of it, the more I made up my mind that it was all tommy-rot; and that what this town needed was to be rebuked at the polls; and Bill Grey said he was with me from the word go.

So Bill and I got up a Greenback procession, which consisted of him and me and Tad and Emerson and Charlie Barlow and Bob Leighton and John Bowles (who both of them agreed to march for ten cents apiece, although they ought to have done it for nothing, seeing I had let them in on that schoolhouse job), and Tweenish Dishrag, who found that gun and got the dollar, and who was grateful to me for doing what I said I would;

and a lot of other Dishrags and lanterns and a fife and drum and a big transparency labelled: —

"WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH GREENBACKS?"

and borne proudly aloft by Stonewall Jackson marching ahead. (That was *me.*)

But Tommy Dodge refused to march with us, because he said his principles were the other way; and that the greenback which financed the war for us, when gold crawled into its hole and pulled the hole in after it, wasn't good enough for us, now that it was safe for gold to crawl out again!

Well, if Tommy had had any principles of his own, I would have respected him; but as he was just voting with his father, I told him to go to grass. We could get enough men of moral stamina to march in our procession without kidnapping any infants from the bosom of their families; and Tommy got mad, — just over a little thing like that!

Well, as I was saying, that procession was a credit to the Greenback party; and as we were marching up Main Street, the powers of darkness (which were the big fellows whose fathers voted right) stood on the sidewalk and howled and hooted and plugged rotten potatoes at us; and one of them hit me in the ear and another one hit Bill in the neck; but we didn't

care, because we knew we were suffering for the right.

But when the potatoes began to fly, Bob Leighton said he guessed he was a Republican; and John Bowles said he guessed he was an old-line Democrat; and I



BEARING OUR GALLANT TRANSPARENCY ALOFT.

guess they were, judging by the way they streaked it for the tall timber. And that shows it don't pay to hire people to do right.

But the Dishrags stood firm; and so did all the rest of us, especially Tad and Emerson, who squared off and offered to fight the whole crowd of big fellows on the sidewalk. I tell you, I was proud of our family that

day, because every one could see that we had the stuff in us; and I forgave Tad and Emerson for all the trouble they had been to me in bringing them up and licking them into shape. And in consideration of their noble and high-minded behavior under fire, I called Emerson by his right name from that time on, and gave Tad the degree of LL.D.

And so we closed up our ranks, which had been decimated by the defection of Bob Leighton and John Bowles, and bearing our gallant transparency aloft, we marched up and down Main Street till the big fellows ran out of ammunition, and their fathers made them quit; and Dave Nickerson and Dr. Barker and old Mr. Gerry cheered us for showing the courage of our convictions under a cloud of popular obloquy and potatoes, as the "Star" put it next day. And the "Star" said that the noble fortitude we exhibited under a storm of animadversion and store eggs would do more to carry Belle Isle for the Greenback party than all other influences combined.

And sure enough, after that, our party began to pick up; and we had an orator up from Bangor; and the first thing the "Sunrise" did was to call him a "spell-binder"! But he wasn't; he was an orator of the first water, even if he *didn't* drink pitcher after pitcher of it, as most of them did; and he didn't have any bottle along to inspire him, either. No, sir, all he needed to inspire ***him*** was



the cause of Greenbacks and the people; and thus inspired, he put up an eloquent and logical and convincing defence of our principles to a crowded house in Goodrich Hall. And he pointed with pride to our procession, and said that out of the mouth of babes the Greenback party was ordained as the avenger of the people.

And then the big fellows called us "the babes," which was all the arguments they had in stock; and the "Sunrise" said that the mob of tatterdemalions which had recently disgraced our streets was a fitting type of the kind of politics which were advocated in the "Star"; and that rotten potatoes were the best kind of arguments to use against such rottenness as we represented.

And then the "Star" wanted to know which was rottener; to brave the onslaughts of hoodlums as we did, or to get up a big slush fund, as the "Sunrise" was doing on the quiet, in order to insure that every one voted right?

And the "Sunrise" blustered and swore that every dollar of their campaign funds was going to be used for honorable purposes, whereas the funds which the "Star" was raising would be devoted to the usual purpose of corrupting a free and enlightened people who would otherwise vote right.

And then the "Star" wanted to know why the "Sunrise" didn't change its name to something appropriate, like the "Pitchdark," or the "Midnight Groan," or

something that would give you an idea what it was up to.

And then the "Sunrise" said that it had long been the acknowledged light of this town and the county and all the country round, from Madewaska to Mars Hill.



ALL THE OLD QUARRELS GOT RAKED UP

"The candidates that we are supporting," says the "Sunrise," "are pure-minded patriots with a single eye to their country's good; whereas the 'Star' is well known to be backing a vile conspiracy of mercenaries who are out for the stuff; and we call on all patriotic voters to rally to the standard of purity and light, and

defeat this compact of demagogic dupes and offscourings of treason, banded together for plunder, perjury, and perdition."

That was the way they started in, but it was nothing to what they said after they got going; and the whole town took sides, and argued and laid down the law and jawed back and forth; and all the old quarrels got raked up again, and there was no end of people that weren't on speaking terms.

Bill said they were hurrying up the campaign funds all over town; and that all the leading citizens had had their legs pulled and that even old John Skinner had had to give up five dollars; and was now sick abed in consequence.

I asked Bill what the campaign funds were for; and he said, oh, to pay for spell-binders and literature and rum, and voters, and so on.

"Let 'em pay!" says I. "All we rely on is facts and arguments."

"Well," says Bill, "that might do, if that was the only kind of arguments that was used in politics; but as it is," says he, "I'm afraid the enemy is going to triumph, because there's so many men in this town that would sell their souls for a bottle of rum," says Bill; "and then, if you'd throw in fifty cents, you could have what was left of 'em."

Well, that disgusted me, for one. And then Dad heard

'em talking around about the sinews of war, and fighting the devil with fire, and so on, and that disgusted *him;* and next Sunday he broke loose again with a rip-snorter on "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

"In other words," says Dad, "what shall it profit a political party to gain an election and lose its character? Better lose a thousand elections than win one by fraud," says he. "Talk about fighting the devil with fire! You might as well talk about fighting a duck with water. The devil is a salamander!" says Dad; "and the more fire you use on him, the better he likes it; because he knows that you are the one that's going to get burnt. Besides," says Dad, "who is the devil, anyhow, when every one is tarred with the same stick and is doing the devil's work?"

That was the way he put her through; and every one liked it, except the politicians, and they pretended it didn't hurt *them* any; but you could see them squirm just the same — that is, all except the Greenbackers; and we knew that *our* hands were clean, because we didn't have any campaign funds, anyhow. And *we* didn't go home and say that religion ought not to meddle with politics, and how sorry we were to see the minister driving nails in his own coffin like that! No, sir; we left all that to the pure-minded patriots who voted right.

And Mother heard about it at the sewing circle, where

you hear all the fool things that are said in town; and when she got home, she said she *did* wish the ten commandments were more popular in churches, so that a minister could mention one of them now and then without risking his job. And Dad said, he'd risk the people and the job too. They'd think it over, he said, and cool down and conclude that maybe religion *did* have something to do with politics, after all. But Mother had her doubts about it, and so did I, especially if the Greenback party was defeated.

Well, who cares if the "Sunrise" *did* come out all roosters crowing themselves crazy over their great victory all over the country? What did that amount to? *Belle Isle was carried for the Greenback party by an overwhelming majority;* and if that wasn't a defeat for the "Sunrise," what was it? Bill and I agreed that if our procession could have marched and bled and suffered from Maine to California, the result would have been different; but we couldn't be everywhere, of course, so the country had to take the consequences.

And they turned the postmaster out, because he was under suspicion of voting wrong, and put in another one that wasn't a quarter part as good; and then everything settled down just as it was before.

It reminded me of Tommy Dodge's piece that he spoke one Friday afternoon up at the Academy:—

"The thunder roared,
The lightning flashed,
And grandma's teapot
Went to smash."

And that was all there was to it, or the election either, except a lot of back talk about bribery and corruption and demagogues and treason and anarchy and slush funds, and so on, till Dad said he was sick and tired of the whole business.



A Lot of Back Talk.

But I told him he ought to feel encouraged, because Belle Isle had gone for the Greenbackers; and that proved that the majority of us were honest and open to conviction and impervious to the temptations that were held out to us by the pure-minded patriots.

"Fudge, fudge," says Dad. "You think all the virtue is on your side and all the vice is on the other; and that

shows just how green you are; and I suppose that's why you call yourself a Greenbacker?" says he.

And then he and Mother, and Irene and all of them laughed and snickered and crowed till I was disgusted with the whole pack; because this was a sample of the kind of argument that Dad's crowd had put up all through the campaign. But I treated them with scorn, and defied them to produce a single Greenbacker who had sold his vote for filthy lucre, or bought one either; whereas Dad had had to wallop his own crowd for unblushing political corruption; and every one in town had taken it personally, except the Greenbackers; "and if that don't prove whose toes were trodden on, what does it prove?" says I.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRUTH ABOUT POLITICS

"DICK," says Dr. Barker to me one day, "since you left off writing about reform, the whole country has been going to the dogs. Can't you give us something about politics?"

"Oh, go 'long!" says I.

"Fact!" says the Doctor. "That last piece of yours and Bill's got copied into all the papers, and the whole country is calling for more."

"Let's see some of those papers," says I (because I wasn't going to be made a fool of at my age, and I knew the Doctor was full of his jokes). But he took me into his office, and sure enough, there was the piece in the "Lewiston Journal" and the "Bangor Whig" and the "Portland Transcript" and the "Boston Herald," which were the papers by which public opinion was moulded all through the United States. But I pretended not to be much astonished, and tossed the papers round as if that was nothing very great; and at last I said, "Well, Doctor," says I, "I can't give you much encouragement just now, because election's over, for one thing."

"What of that?" says the Doctor. "We want to begin right away moulding public opinion for the next campaign."

"Well, I would in a minute," says I, "only for two or three business deals I've got on hand, which will take up all my spare time."

"Is that so?" says the Doctor, looking awfully sorry. "Then I suppose the world will have to wait; only, don't you keep 'em waiting any longer than you can help, Dick," says he; "because it's a sin and a shame to hide a light like yours under a bushel of business, when the world is just suffering for the lack of it," says he.

Well, of course I was pleased to hear the Doctor talk like that; and I decided to write the piece, knowing that Kitty would be sure to see it in the paper, and that Dad and Mother and Irene and all of them would have something to say.

So I never said boo to any one, not even to Bill (because this time I wanted it to be all my own, and not have Irene saying that Bill wrote it for me); but I just worked away at it alone every night on the dining room table. And Irene got curious, of course, and said: —

"I wonder what Dick's up to now? I suppose he's getting up something *awful* smart to read at a temperance meeting."

"Never you mind, Iyee Wowo," says I. "You wait and you'll see. Only, this is no temperance tommy-rot."

Well, when the piece was done, I took it round to the "Star" office and tossed it on the table in front of the Doctor and said: "There's that piece about politics, Doctor" (as if it was no trouble to do that much any time). "And if there's anything wrong about it," says I, "just fix it up to suit yourself."

The Doctor looked curious and interested and took up the piece and read it over and chuckled to himself; and then he said the piece was all right just as it was, and he wouldn't change a word of it for a five-dollar bill.

Next week, sure enough, the piece came out on the front page of the "Star," just as I wrote it: and I got a copy of the paper and brought it home with me and kept it till they were all at supper; and then handed it out to Dad. "There, Dad," says I, "there's something the Doctor wanted me to write for him."

"Ho, ho, ho!" says Dad, "let's see!" and he spread out the paper, and there it was under big head-lines.

"POLLATICKS

"There are many kinds of ticks, such as bed-ticks, wood-ticks, and pollaticks; and very hard it is to tell which of the three is worst, as the poet remarks. Bed-ticks are full of straw, and wood-ticks are full of teeth, and pollaticks are full of original sin, — as we shall see.

"There is money in pollaticks for those that understand it, and this kind are called politicians. The rest of us can make a little something now and then by voting right, and knowing which side will win before we place our bets.

"In pollaticks, each side thinks the other side has got all the rascals; but my idea is that there are rascals enough to go around.

"If a man wants to be honest in pollaticks, the best way is to climb a tree and stay there. I wouldn't take a political job for a farm. If a man is going to be postmaster, he's got to give up going to heaven first; and plenty of men in this town are willing to make the sacrifice.

"The politicians claim if it wasn't for them, the sun wouldn't rise in the morning and the rain wouldn't fall, and crops wouldn't grow; and hens would forget to lay, and cows would stop giving milk and eating grass and getting fat; and the reason why they don't stop is because the right party is in power. And that is why we got such a good crop of potatoes this fall, and sold them for twenty-five cents a bushel.

"Such is the song and dance that the politicians give us; and no end of intelligent citizens in this town will open their mouths and gulp it down; which all goes to show how astute and enlightened and up-to-date we are.

"The chief business of politicians is saving the country; and this is the way they do it.

"November first, for instance, you behold us all virtuous and happy and engaged in earning an honest living by cheating each other, when along comes a spell-binder with the burning message that *half* of us are rascals. Next week arrives another spell-binder with the same opinion of the other half, and every one pitches in to prove that both opinions are correct.

"Ink, eloquence, and whiskey are freely shed; heads and hearts and commandments are broken; till at last, sure enough, the biggest slush fund wins, the post-office changes hands, and the country is saved!

"This is the noble and high-minded programme that we go through every four years, and which has won us our proud preëminence as a people; and if that is so, I pity the rest of them.

"Pollaticks is worse than rum for making people hate each other and act like a man with a jag on. Some get over it after a while, but others go round as crazy as loons from one election to the next; and this kind ought to be shut up in a lunatic asylum; only, it would pretty near depopulate this town.

"DICK NEWMAN."

Well, it beats all the way a man's relatives will behave to him, when he has a piece in the paper!

Irene read it over and sniffed and said, pooh, she'd be ashamed if she couldn't spell politics, — p-o-l-i-t-i-c-s, — politics, — there!" And she spelled it off glib and smart, the way girls do when they know anything. "I suppose Dick thought Kitty would think he was smart!" says she. "Yes, she'll think he's *awful* smart when she sees all that bad spelling!"

"That's all the brains a girl has got!" says I. "Any fool could see that that spelling was done a-purpose, like Petroleum V. Nasby's."

It was the biggest lie I ever told; and I made Irene and the whole family believe it, too; and think they were green not to see it. And Mother said she didn't know but the spelling was the best part of it; and then Dad screwed up his face, the way he always did when I had him touched under the fifth rib, and said, fudge, fudge; he thought I'd better pay more attention to my grammar; and anyhow, there was too much worldly wisdom in the piece to suit him. He said he'd rather see me have more confidence in my fellow-citizens, even if some of them *were* bad.

"That's all right, Dad," says I, "but I don't see how its going to make 'em any less bad by calling 'em angels when they're no such thing, and we know it. Maybe that's your remedy for store eggs?" says I. "Just call 'em fresh and let it go at that?"

Well, that appealed to the family; and all Dad could

say in reply was that better than the knowledge of evil was the knowledge of good, and so on. That kind of talk is all right for a sermon; but you noticed that Dad didn't put much of it in *his*.

And Bonus, — I mean Emerson, — he read the piece without cracking a smile and said that the significance of it was not obvious to him; and that it was unintelligible to the verge of absurdity.

"Well, Emerson," says I, "if you was to investigate the psychology of absurdity, you would disintegrate a few unprecedented prognostications," says I.

And then Emerson studied that awhile, and said he didn't see any intelligibility to that, either.

"Maybe not, Emerson," says I; "because the peculiarity of intelligibility is that it takes something besides platitudinous ponderosity to investigate it," says I.

(Now you understand, of course, that Emerson and I were now treating each other respectfully, owing to the fact that we had both stood together in the forefront of battle. All the same, I wasn't bound to put up with *all* the big words in the dictionary; so I thought I would show him that any one could use that kind of language, if he was fool enough; but it never did Emerson any good. He just remembered the longest words and used them himself the first chance he got.)

So that was all the impression I made on my own

family. "A prophet is not without honor," and so on, as Dad would say in a sermon, and then forget the point of it!

But Eli Teak and Bill Grey and Dave Nickerson and a lot of others read it and said: "Bully for you, Dick! Hit 'em again! Give 'em Hades, Dick; that's what they need!" and so on.

And that despised piece was copied into all the papers in the United States, except the "Sunrise," which said, "We understand that our bewildered contemporary, the 'Star,' despairing of its own brains, has handed over its columns to fifteen-year-old boys. This is doubtless a great improvement for the 'Star'; but for ourselves, we prefer to continue our time-honored policy which has led the 'Sunrise' to the heights of influence which it now occupies, and redeemed this county, in part, from the reproach levelled at its fair fame by the shallow and meretricious 'Star.'"

That was the kind of yawp that the "Sunrise" always got off when the "Star" published anything that was worth reading. But I didn't care, as long as all the rest of the papers had copied it; so I got a big bundle of those papers and carried them home and showed them to Dad; and he opened his eyes, and says he, "Hi, hi, hi! Well, well, well!" And then he looked them all over and screwed up his face and said, "Well, maybe there *was* something in that piece, after all;

and maybe I was going to turn out a great editor like Horace Greeley; and in that case, what I needed besides sound principles was Latin and Greek; and we'd begin the Greek right away. And then Dad hauled me up into the study and set me at work on, "Ho, hay, toe; Too, tase, too," and so on, for an hour or two a day *in vacation!* It was worse than politics, or anything I had tackled yet; and I wished I had never written that piece or meddled with politics or business or rum, or anything that flesh is heir to, as the poet remarks; because, the minute you try to reform anything in this world, it's sure to get you into trouble.

By this time our family were getting quite celebrated for literary ability. Irene made fun of me; but Tad and Emerson were both trying their hand; and Emerson, who was a great student of Peter Parley, decided to write an epoch-making composition on Napoleon Bonaparte.

"Mother," says he, "I could write a piece about Napoleon, if I had paper enough; but it would take quires and quires of paper," says he.

"Well," says Mother, "here's the first quire. Now you fill that up, and then I'll give you another."

So Emerson scornfully takes a quire, and sits down and writes: "Napoleon Bonaparte was born in the Island of Corsica. He encountered the Austrians at

the battle of Austerlitz and defeated them with great slaughter."

And that was as far as Emerson ever got on his epoch-making composition; and I said he did pretty well to make Bonaparte hop right out of his cradle and go for the Austrians like that!

Well, it looks easy enough to toss off something on paper till you come to try it, and then you find it is about as easy as digging ditch.

The trouble with most people is, they try to write about something they don't know anything about.

Tad had to write a piece for Friday afternoon at the Academy; and first he set out to write on George Washington; but I advised him to write on Shingles; because Tad didn't know anything about George, but the little hatchet story; whereas, maybe he knew something about shingles, as he had just got a Saturday afternoon job to bunch them for Sam Gerry, who was on Irene's list of candidates. Tad felt pretty big about that job of his; and so, he took my advice for once; and the next Friday afternoon he marches up in front of the whole school with his piece:—

"Shingles," says Tad.

"There are three kinds of shingles, such as scoots, extras, and clears. The highest is clears; extras next, scoots next.

"I bunch shingles at Gerry's mill."

And then Tad marches off again, smiling; and the house came down; till at last young Atwell had to call the school to order, and then he said:—

"Tad has certainly set us an example of brevity, which is the soul of wit, as Shakespeare says. Also it is evident that Tad knows what he is talking about, which is more than you can say of some writers."

Well, Tad thought he was a great man, *sure;* and after that, all the compositions were built on Tad's plan for quite a while. There were three kinds of horses and dogs and cows and hens and geese and ducks and flies and mosquitoes and rum and politicians and fools and pretty nearly everything on earth; till at last, young Atwell said there were also three kinds of compositions, if not more; and he didn't want any more of *that* kind for the present.

CHAPTER XX

SOCIETY

WELL, if politics and business and rum, and so on, were all there was to life, I would want to die; and so would every one that was half decent; and there wouldn't be any one left alive but old John Skinner and Arthur Wiley and that kind of people; and they would want to die, too, so they could get at the rest of us. And the reason why we keep on living along is because once in a while you can go swimming or skating or sliding down hill or hunting or fishing or camping out or to a dance or a play or a church sociable or a horse race or something of that kind; and I shall now tell about some of these things that don't make you sick every time you think about them.

And some people think it is also fun to go to church; and maybe it is, if you don't have to; but you don't want to say much about religion to a minister's family, because they get all they want of it right along.

And that's the reason why the people who sell rum don't drink it themselves; and why doctors don't take their own doses; and farmers won't eat any

vegetables, when they can get canned goods and patent medicine. Being in a minister's family is something like that, or keeping a candy store: you get so you don't want any of it yourself.

But that didn't hurt us any with the people, because they all felt the same way on week-days; and they all liked Dad first-rate for letting them play High-Low-Jack in our front parlor, or their own, either, instead of getting them so rattled that they would hide their cards every time the minister pulled the door-bell. But Dad said if it was nothing but cards he had to deal with, he wouldn't lose much sleep. If all games were played as fair and square and good-natured as High-Low-Jack, there wouldn't be much call for preaching, Dad said; and I guess he was not far from right.

And right here was where Dad and Elder Pritchard parted company; because the Elder held that the four corner-stones of Satan's kingdom were cards and dancing and plays and rum; whereas Dad held that the *real* corner-stones were business and politics and religion and *beans*, as at present understood; and the same with pie and hot biscuit. And Dad said that all you had to do in order to understand total depravity was to watch the way people would shovel beans and pie and hot biscuit and so on into their stomachs at all hours of the day and night. And then the Belle Islers laughed merrily at him and Elder Pritchard both,



and called for more pie and a fresh deal at High-Low-Jack, or any game there was going.

Well, it would do you good to hear old Mr. Gerry and L. S. Blood and Dr. Barker and Dr. Fenton and Deacon Goodrich and all of them laughing and carrying on like a pack of boys over a game of High-Low-Jack! You'd never suppose, to see them at it, that *they* were the ones that managed business and politics, and so on; but they were the same people, and no mistake.

As Dr. Barker said in the "Star": "Our town," says he, "is by no means devoid of the fellow feeling that makes us wondrous kind; and when the stern arbitrament of business is over, we are as generous with the spoils as Robin Hood was with what he stole." (I cut that out of the "Star," so as to get the language right; and a lot of other things; and the same with the "Sunrise"; but I soon found out that you didn't have to do that; because, after a while, you could go on writing forever in their style, and never look at the paper.)

Well, that thing about Robin Hood made a lot of people mad, and two or three of them stopped the paper; but it was true, just the same; and the Doctor didn't care, because, as he said in the next issue, they never paid their subscriptions, anyhow; and the "Star" would be money in its pocket without them.

And that Robin Hood business reminds me that every time the society met at our house, they always left a big lot of butter and eggs (fresh ones) and cheese and pickles and I don't know what; but there was enough of it to feed the family a month on.

Our people were a generous crowd when it came to donation parties, or anything of that kind; and after they had sold us all the watches and chairs and eggs and butter and other old things that they didn't want, they would sort of relent and come round with some of the things they ate themselves; and I was always glad of it, because that was about the only way we could get anything that was fit to eat in Belle Isle.

The meat man wouldn't ever sell us any good meat, and the grocery man wouldn't sell us any good butter, or tea, or coffee, or molasses, or eggs, or anything. My, but the eggs were awful in that town! The hens and roosters were crowing all around us, but the eggs they laid were the limit. Anyhow, that was what they were by the time they got round to *us*.

Mother said it all came of trading with your own parishioners; but we mustn't ever say anything about it outside of the family, she said, or we would be worse off than ever.

And Dave Nickerson said he respected a man that could take dead horse and store eggs and turn 'em into gospel, the way Elder Newman could; but he'd be

blanked if he respected the sons of guns that made him do it.

And then Dave said he guessed he'd go and get something to tone up his morals; and Uncle Dan'l Crump said: "That Dave Nickerson's a bad man; and he knows mighty well that I don't sell no dead horse, nor no rum nor tobacco, nor anything I hadn't ought to; and that's all the credit you get for honesty in this town," says Uncle Dan'l.

But Dave hadn't mentioned any names; so I couldn't see what Uncle Dan'l was feeling so bad about.

Uncle Dan'l Crump was a great admirer of my mother and all smart women except his own wife; and every one admired *her* but Uncle Dan'l, and he said, Yes, she was smart enough, but she wasn't nothing to his first one. You had to be either dead or somebody else's wife before Uncle Dan'l would admire you.

Well, as I was saying, it *was* some relief to get out of politics and into something else for a while; and so, as there was a call for dramatic exhibitions to keep the church going, I decided to take part in a temperance play, down at Goodrich Hall.

Mother said that Dad earned the salary once by preaching sermons; and then Irene and I earned it all over again down at Goodrich Hall. But that was all right, because all the churches had to earn money

that way, or else by church fairs, which were a good deal more painful and not half so much fun.

There were a lot of good actors in Belle Isle, owing to the fact that being forty miles from Holton by stage-coach, we had to rely on home talent, or else not have any at all, except dramatic companies that came along, from Boston, they said; and were worse than the temperance lecturers. It would give you a fit to hear them ranting and raving up and down the stage and charging you a quarter for the performance.

Charlie Taggart, who declaimed "Rrrrogah's me dahg," could beat Boston all to pieces at that sort of thing; and there was one play of George M. Baker's, where Charlie came out particularly strong in the villain's part. It was where the villain became stung by remorse for having drowned a baby who was alive all the time and strutting round the stage making love to the heroine. Eli Teak took that part and did it nobly; only, Nelly Fenton, who was the heroine, wished it was Arthur Gerry. — Well, as I was saying, when it came to the remorseful part, Charlie Taggart came out strong and rushed up and down the stage holding on to his hair with both hands and drawing in his breath as if he had the asthma, and groaning it out again, in a horrid gasping way like this: —

"Oh, hev-ens, ah — ugh! If I could but shut out that sight, ah — ugh! Cul-lose those eyes that haunt

me everry-whairrre, ah — ugh! Oh, rrrrrrevenge is sweet indeed, ah — ugh! — but rrrrrremorse, ah — ugh, — is terrible to bear!"

Yes, it *was* terrible, and no mistake! And then Charlie would clutch madly at his hair and stagger off the stage, while the audience heaved a sigh of relief and mopped the sweat from its visage. Every one felt the villainy of Charlie's impersonation, and when we wanted anything in that line, we always knew where to look. No one could compete with Charlie in his specialty, and so he had it all to himself. And Charlie was all right in comedy, too; only he wasn't half as amusing in comedy as he was in tragedy.

And this shows all the dependence that can be placed in girls; because Alice Dodge would pretend to laugh at Charlie's tragedy, along with the rest of us; and the next you knew, you would see her at a dance with him, or out riding in a buggy, and the both of them looking as happy as clams in high water!

Well, Charlie was a first-rate fellow, anyhow, and one of the most promising young lawyers in Belle Isle; and I didn't blame Alice much for not giving herself away any more than she had to.

So Charlie was our star tragedian; and the rest of us were equally good at something.

When they wanted a nice, *good* girl, they would choose Nellie Fenton, or Mildred or Kitty or Alice Dodge;

and when they wanted a girl that was full of ginger and pickles, and prunes and red peppers, they would choose Irene, because all she had to do was just be her natural self, and she couldn't be improved on.

And Marshall Beaman, who was a big, solemn young chap, was great at an old man's part; but when he tried to do the young lover, he was worse than a telegraph pole.

But once, Marshall came out strong on both parts, and that was when he was an old man, about eighty or ninety, in love with a young girl about seventeen (that was Iyee Wowo); and Marshall tottered around the stage, mumbling: "So I shall see the deah girl herself, and learn from her own lips that sh' loves mi."

Marshall could do *that* kind of lover all right; but other times, they didn't give him much love-making to do. Besides, that was Hal Goodrich's specialty, and Sam Gerry's and Eli Teak's. They would put Eli on for a lost heir harassed by misfortune; and every one said he looked the part.

And once they let Bill Grey try the young lover alongside of Irene; and she said she never knew any one to play that part half so nice as Bill; and she never supposed he had it in him!

When it came to me, they would give me anything that was left over after the others were satisfied. They'd let me be a fop with an eye-glass, or a second-rate

villain, or a country bumpkin; or else, I just had to come in and say: "Me Lud, me Lud's coach is ready"; and any one that wants that kind of part, can have it, for all me.

But in minstrel shows they were glad to get me, because I could sing and play the violin. And once I was a darky girl in a kinky wig that I made myself out of mohair, and a yellow dress of Irene's that she wouldn't be seen in; and nobody knew who it was; and Bill made love to me in a pair of overalls and one suspender, which broke down; so that Bill had to hold up the overalls with one hand and make love with the other; and we brought down the house.

CHAPTER XXI

DAVE NICKERSON'S DANCING SCHOOL

ALONG about this time Dave Nickerson got so dead broke that he decided to start a dancing school, one winter, at three dollars a term for gentlemen, and ladies free. So the parents agreed to let us go, if Dave would agree to keep sober and quit swearing till after the school was over.

So Dave agreed to do it, if it killed him; and got up a big class; and Dad gave in three dollars for me, in partial recognition of the violin lessons that Dave had given me, and for which he had refused to take anything in particular from Dad, as a slight contribution in support of the gospel, he said.

"I don't never give nothin' for religion," says Dave, "because it's been the ruination of me, by havin' it rammed down my throat so hard when I was a boy, and stirrin' up all the cussedness there was in me; and givin' me such a start on the road to hell that I been goin' there ever since. All the same," says Dave, "I jus' lieves chip in a few lessons to oblige Elder Newman, because he ain't so hard on you as some of 'em."

So everything was lovely, and Dad had got me a new suit of clothes, in which I looked like somebody for the first time in my life; because, thus far, Dad had always taken me to the tailor and said: "Cut them big; the boy is growing." And then the clothes would come home, with the sleeves reaching down to my finger ends, and the pants looking like meal bags, and so on. But this time *I* had something to say about it; and I told Melzer Jenks, Amsy's brother, who cut them for me, that if those clothes didn't fit, we would know the reason why; and the result was that they fitted to a T; and Irene said she never supposed I was so good-looking, and all the girls began to treat me respectfully; and I got a better part in the next play.

Well, I was going to ask Kitty to go to dancing school with me in those clothes, and was keeping them for the occasion.

Bill was a little ahead of me and had already asked Irene to go with him; and I said to myself that if Bill could show as much spunk as all that, why couldn't I ask Kitty to go with me?

By this time I called myself sixteen, so that I was old enough to do anything; and Kitty was fifteen, so that she was old enough to go anywhere.

So I was getting all ready to ask Kitty, and thinking just how I would put it; when one afternoon, Mildred came up to our house and began talking about dancing



DAVE NICKERSON.

school. And Irene said that she was going, of *course;* but didn't mention that it was with Bill Grey; and Mildred said: "I wish *I* had a brother!" supposing, of course, that Irene and I were going together. And then what did I do but up and ask Mildred to go with *me!* Of course it wasn't Mildred's fault; but a man is a fool who will ask one girl to go with him, when he was meaning to ask another, especially when he knows that the other girl knows that he would have *liked* to ask her; and that was what I knew about Kitty.

The minute I asked Mildred, I saw what I had done; and I was hoping she would take it as a joke; because she was two years older than I, though I was tall enough for anybody. And it did seem to amuse Mildred for a minute, and she said: "Why, Dick, I supposed you were going to ask Kitty?"

That made me mad, of course, and I said it was no such thing; and then Mildred sobered down, and said: "Certainly, Dick, I shall be proud to go with you in that new suit of clothes."

So I was in for it, and no mistake. I wondered what Kitty would think about it, and if she wouldn't be kind of sorry, perhaps? But she didn't seem to care, but just laughed at me every time Mildred was mentioned. And Mildred laughed, too, and every one seemed to think it was a great joke, merely because Mildred was older than I! But it's no joke to go to

dancing school with the wrong girl and have the right one laugh at you. But if you have made a fool of yourself, you have to make the best of it; and that was what I had to do for three solid months; and I often thought when I was going home with Mildred, how different it might have been with Kitty; and Mildred thought how different it might have been with Hal Goodrich, I'll bet you! And neither of us got any credit for sacrificing ourselves; but the girls giggled about it at school and made rhymes about us in their compositions on Friday afternoon, this way, —

> "K stands for Kitty whom Dick didn't ask;
> But though he took Mildred he found it a task."

Or else it was, —

> "M stands for Mildred with Dick for her pal;
> But though she looked cheerful, she wished it was Hal."

And so on and so on, — the worst kind of drivel that *any one* could grind out by the yard, if he was fool enough. And Kitty, sitting right there and coloring up to the roots of her hair, and never looking at me for three days afterwards!

Well, I deserved it myself; but I thought it was pretty mean to lug Kitty into it. But girls are equal to anything, almost.

Still, there was *one* rhyme about Irene and Bill which wasn't so bad, and which was one on *them*, —

"I stands for Irene, the minister's daughter,
It is not yet certain that Willy has caught her."

That one brought down the house; but Irene didn't care; and Bill sat there and looked as calm and satisfied as you please, as if *he* had done the square thing, anyhow; and you weren't going to smite him under the fifth rib with any of your cheap poetry. The fact is, I believe that poetry actually *pleased* Bill, and he hoped there was some truth in it!

And Irene put on the same calm, superior countenance, and rubbed it into me in this style: —

"Well," says she, "if you wanted to take Kitty, why didn't you ask her?"

"Who said I wanted to?" says I.

"Well, you know you did, anyhow," says she; "and now I know she thinks less than ever of you, because you didn't have spunk enough to step up like a man."

"You've got too many beaux, Iyee Wowo," says I; "that's what ails *you*. But you haven't got Bill Grey, yet, if he *did* ask you to go to dancing school."

"Well," says Irene, serenely, "that's a good beginning, anyhow; and I guess you wish you'd made as good a one with Kitty."

And Emerson looked at me solemnly for about half an hour, as if he was studying out something; till at last, I said, "Emerson, my son, what are you thinking so hard about?"

"I was thinking," says he, "whether the disparity in years between you and Mildred would constitute an insuperable obstacle to matrimony."

"Look here," says I, "what you want to be thinking about is whether the lockjaw would be an insuperable obstacle to conversational cataclysms of that kind."

And then Dad called me down for cruelty to my little brother, and administered a sermon on how we should always return short words for long ones, and so on. But was Emerson required to mitigate the fury of his phrascology? Oh, no!

So that was the way I got it right and left. And Mildred wasn't *dying* to go with me to that dancing school, either. No, *she* was dying to go with Hal Goodrich, who was dying to go with Irene; only, Bill was a little ahead of him that time. And so Mildred and I were both of us sacrificed; but she was a nice girl about it, just the same, and acted proud of me, and made jokes about it at a proper time; and that is more than most of them would do under the circumstances.

Well, anyhow, I learned to dance that winter, so that I didn't have to tread on Kitty's toes when I danced with her afterwards, the way I did on Mildred's, while I was learning; and that was some comfort.

And I learned the Lancers and the Portland Fancy

and Virginia Reel, and Money Musk and Durang's Hornpipe, and Rickett's Hornpipe and Plain Quadrilles, and the Waltz and the Schottische and the Polka, and the whole rigmarole; and I learned, also, that



BOTH SACRIFICED.



all this is hard work without the right girl for a partner.

But you ought to have seen Dave Nickerson, though, all through that dancing school! Dave was the pink of propriety, they said, and kept as sober as a deacon the whole twelve weeks, and never swore once; but sometimes I wished he would for *me*.

Dave was all shaved and brushed up and dressed like a dude in a brand-new suit of blue broadcloth and a white tie and a shine that you could see your face in. It was wonderful how Dave's manners picked up in that dancing school; and if any of our manners

failed to come up to par, Dave showed us what was what in short order. But Dave always said, if he didn't behave himself, it wasn't because he didn't know how; because he had as good a bringing up as there was in town.

"Why, my old Dad would always lick me, if I swore," says Dave; "and my mother would cry; and they give me a good education and a pile of money; and I guess that was what done the business. I got to crookin' my elbow along with the boys and paintin' the town red; and so now it's nothin' but swearin' old Dave Nickerson, with nothin' much left but a horse and a fiddle; and I may have to sell the horse before long; but blank me," says Dave, "if I ever sell that fiddle to any blankety-blanked whangdoodler in this town." (This was afterwards, you understand, when Dave was at liberty to swear again.)

Well, it was kind of sad to hear Dave run on in that reckless kind of way; but now that he had his good clothes on, and the good manners that he used to have, you could see what Dave was in his prime. Every one said it was a pity Dave couldn't keep right on the way he was now, because he was almost an ornament to society; but Dave said it was the hardest work he ever tackled, behaving like a Sunday School teacher all the time; and he was going to swear a blue streak

and drink a tubful of rum the minute he was through with this contract.

And Irene won Dave's heart right away by learning the steps so easy, and calling him Mr. Nickerson, as if he was something a little too nice; and playing accompaniments for him, every now and then, till Dave was delighted; and says he to me: "Dick, that sister of yours has got the music in her. Prettiest girl in the room, too! Just look at her dance, will you?" says Dave (fiddling right along, mind you, in a way that struck me green with envy). "Just look at her!" says he, admiringly. "Skips over the floor like a three-year-old filly, and makes half of 'em look like jumping-jacks!"

Well, maybe Dave *did* open my eyes a little about Iyee Wowo. She *was* a pretty nice girl to look at, and no mistake, and a fascinating conversationalist to boot, especially with Bill and the other fellows; but when she got hold of me, once or twice, she gave me lessons for nothing.

"Oh, you're doing well, Dick," says she, "because you've got the music in you, and that's something; only, don't count the time like dollars and cents; and don't grab me like a clothes-wringer; and don't turn such sharp corners all of a sudden; and don't run me up against people," and so on and so on, till at last I said: —

"See here, Iyee Wowo, you remind me of a poem."

"Is that so?" says she, looking pleased to death. "Why, Dick," says she, "what poem is it?"

"Why," says I, "it's the one that says, 'I chatter, chatter, as I flow,' and so on."

And then Iyee Wowo aimed a cuff at my ear, and the dance was done. I tell you, there is nothing like a sister for giving you discipline!

And Dave taught us to be invariably polite and respectful to the ladies; and not tread on their toes, or hug them like bears; and not to drop them into their seats like hot potatoes and rush off for the next one; but linger around a minute or two and talk about the weather; and not to be hogs and always want to dance with the same ones, and so on.

Well, I could take *that* advice easy enough; as there was only one that I might have been hoggish about, and she wasn't there. It's easy enough to be unselfish about things that you don't want. And as for this unselfishness that consists in asking the wrong girl to dancing school, I was sick of it before I began; but of course I was perfectly polite and respectful to Mildred, just the same, because it wasn't her fault, if I *had* made a fool of myself; and I wasn't going to have her suffer for *my* sins.

Dave said that by the time the school was over,

he'd almost forgot how to swear or drink either; and it took him some time to get back into practice; and he hoped every one would excuse him, if he wasn't quite up to condition; but the way that rum and cussedness were flowing into town, he'd soon be doing his old stunts; because what this town needed, he said, was a town swearer to cuss things day and night.

Well, the minute that dancing school started in, old Elder Pritchard got on his war horse and waded into it, hammer and tongs. He said, the Elder did, that dancing was where the devil got in his best work; and that the result would be that we would all of us start on the toboggan slide, especially with Dave Nickerson to start us. But Dave took it good-naturedly, and said he was so used to being cussed by the clergy that it never phased him a continental.

Besides, the Elder would strain out the gnat of dancing school, then swallow the camel of kissing parties, which was the only amusement that was allowed in his church; whereas, it was frowned upon in ours, and Dad said he'd like to catch us doing any such thing; but he didn't have to worry, because all of our crowd despised such amusements in public.

But even supposing that dancing was as bad as Elder Pritchard said it was, I guess he realized later on that

it wasn't the devil's long suit, or anything like it. As Dave Nickerson said, "What the Hades would old Nick be fooling away time for on such small potatoes as dancing schools, when he had his hands full running business and politics and religion and everything there was a-going?"

CHAPTER XXII

THE CONCEITEDNESS OF BELLE ISLE

IN this chapter I shall put in all the things that don't seem to fit in anywhere else, just as you have a rag-bag and a catch-all and a button-box and a string-bag, and so on, for your odds and ends. And yet, some of the most interesting things will be found in such places; and whenever you want a suspender button or a fish-hook, for instance, you know where to look for it.

And there are also some people who keep their religion in the rag-bag, because that is where it belongs, probably; and once I asked Dad if that wasn't what ailed the Belle Islers; and he said, fudge, fudge; he didn't see but the Belle Islers made as much use of their religion as any one; and maybe he was right; only, if so, it was pretty hard on the rest of the world.

Well, as I was saying, my grandmother had a cap-box about the size of a molasses hogshead, where the whole family kept everything they didn't want, except their religion, which they kept in a church, like every one else; and Mother said they were one of the best families in Putnam County, N.Y.; and I had better be careful

what I said about them, too. You can run down your father's family all you like; but when it comes to your mother's, you will find that silence is golden.

But, anyhow, this chapter will be like that cap-box except as to size, and will contain all the odds and ends that have got to go somewhere; and I wish that Dickens and Bill Nye and Shakespeare and Josh Billings and other great writers had built their books on this plan, and put in a rag-bag chapter, so that you wouldn't have to wade through rags up to your neck to get at the story, but could skip them all at once, as you can in this one, if you are fool enough.

Well, to begin with, the name of our town, for instance!

Belle Isle means Beautiful Island, you understand; but it wasn't an island, nor anything like it, but was just named so after another town of the same name by the Frenchmen who settled the place away back in eighteen hundred and froze to death; just as you will see places named New Jerusalem that are no more like it than Sodom and Gomorrah.

Eli Teak said he supposed that was why our town was named Belle Isle; because it was neither beautiful nor an island nor anything it ought to be; and they said that *that* was what defeated Eli for Justice of the Peace. But you would think it was the island of the blessed, to hear them talk. Of course, the "Star"

took a reform view of the case, which kept its subscription low; but when the "Sunrise" got to going, you'd say we were in the happy hunting-grounds, to say the least; and maybe we were, from an Injun point of view, as Eli Teak said in a "Star" article, which came near getting him tarred and feathered. But you could see for yourself how near right he was.

For instance, the streets of Paradise are paved with gold; but the streets of Belle Isle were paved with mud. And there were also board sidewalks to keep you out of the mud, and which were fine for coasting on when the snow was light; and it was great fun to see people hop off into the mud, when you yelled to them to clear the track. And once, when it was too late, I saw that it was Editor Stackpole who was climbing out of the mud again; and old Stack went straight to his office and wrote an editorial a yard long on the peril to life and limb from the youth of this section.

"Shall a citizen of this town," says he, "known and honored from Madewaska to Mars Hill, be compelled to sudden, undignified, and narrow escapes from instant death at the hands of marauding and pestiferous boys, intent on nothing but their own reprehensible and destructive diversions? Shall the only journalistic light which pierces the Stygian darkness shed by that extinguished luminary, the 'Star,' be quenched in eternal night?"

And so on, and so on, till you wished you had quenched him and done with. And the "Star" said the same the very next week. "Certainly," says the "Star." "It is high time the 'Sunrise' was quenched for good and all; and any small boy who can do the job, whether by sled, velocipede, or other implement, will earn the gratitude of a long-suffering world." So that was the kind of fare we had served up to us in the press. Which reminds me.

In Paradise, the bill of fare is ambrosia and nectar; but in Belle Isle it was pork and potatoes and tough beef and baked beans and brown bread and pie and doughnuts and hot biscuit and coffee and rum, the fell destroyer, and *eggs*, — O my!

In Paradise, they live in mansions, or out on the lawn, just as they take a notion; but in Belle Isle, the mansions were about the size of my grandmother's cap-box, all except Deacon Goodrich's, and that wasn't much bigger, if it *was* so awe-inspiring to most of us. But as for me, I wasn't so awe-inspired as I would have been if I hadn't been to Boston and seen about four million houses about twelve times as big as the Deacon's, and nobody much awe-inspired either. But of course it wouldn't do to mention that to the Belle Islers; because, as the Deacon's mansion was all there was to be awe-inspired about, they would naturally expect you to be overcome at the sight of it.

Then again, in Paradise, the music is performed by a heavenly choir, led by Gabriel with his trumpet, and pretty near equal to the Boston Symphony Orchestra. But in Belle Isle, the only music was the wild native song of birds and church choirs and tom cats and fiddlers that Dave Nickerson called "whangdoodlers"; and later on there was a brass band that would make angels weep.

In Paradise, the balmy zephyrs blow all the year round through celestial vines and fig trees, the silvery cloudlets float high in the azure zenith, as the girls say in their compositions, and every month is May, or the first of June at the latest; whereas, in Belle Isle, the snow lay four feet deep on a level eight months in the year, and Old Boreas howled down the chimney like one of Elder Pritchard's sermons; and it took twenty cords of wood to keep you from freezing to death. So that the first thing you saw was generally a man's woodpile; and when you got around behind *that*, you saw his house.

In Paradise, the people spend their time in passing compliments and refreshments, chiefly, and in seeing how good they can be; but in Belle Isle they spend it in thinking up business deals and how to get rid of store eggs and antediluvian butter, and so on.

And yet if Gabriel, for instance, had come down and offered to swap places with Arthur Wiley, Arthur would

have closed one eye at him and said, "You can't cheat me;" and he couldn't. Arthur could have done up the smartest angel that walked the streets of Jerusalem the Golden; and so could any one in Belle Isle; and all of us would have smelt a rat if you had offered us Paradise with a fence around it in exchange for Belle Isle, with a barrel of nectar thrown in against an equal amount of rum.

It was easy to see what we thought of our town by the way we always spoke of the rest of the world as "Outside." "Outside of what?" says I to John Bowles, the first time he sprung the expression on me. "Outside of Belle Isle, you durn fool!" says he.

Well, after that, I saw that I was inside, at last; and that was the way we all of us felt about it. It was understood that there were places outside, like Boston and Bangor, and so on, where the devil had it all his own way; but *in*side, everything was lovely; and virtue flourished, and religion prospered, and the country was saved. And when the spell-binders came along at election time, and told us what an intelligent and enlightened and virtuous community we were, we swallowed it all down as if it was God's truth, instead of the most monumental lie on record; and cheered and hurrahed for ourselves till we were crazy.

Once Elder Pritchard offered a prayer for our children who had left their virtuous homes to encounter

the wiles and snares of a wicked world; but Eli Teak said it was the poor world that needed praying for when such past masters in sin were let loose on it. And sure enough, the whole town went crazy, — just over a little thing like that! — and blanked Eli up hill and down for a liar and a traitor and an infidel and an anarchist and a snide lawyer and a son of a sea-cook and a long string of things with adjectives on in front; and when people talk like that, you may know that some one has been telling the truth again.

But all Eli said in reply was, "Well, maybe I am," says he; "but anyhow, I ain't *quite* such a fool that I don't know what I'm up to; and that's more than most of 'em can say in this town," says Eli.

Now, as to Dave Nickerson's swearing, *I* claimed it was justified in Belle Isle. Not that I would want to do it myself, but if there was any one that was gifted in that line, there was room for him to exercise his talents on the way things were going.

Of course it wouldn't do to put all of Dave's language down on paper; that is, unless it was sermon paper and you were going to use it in church.

For instance, there was good old Elder Pritchard, who used pretty nearly all the language that Dave used and nobody said a word; and there were a good many who said it paid you to go to Elder Pritchard's church just to hear the Elder say "Damnation!"

But that was different, of course; because the Elder meant something else by it from what Dave did. All Dave meant was to let off his feelings; but the Elder meant that if you didn't hurry up your cakes, and take out your fire insurance, you would be roasted and done brown, and boiled in oil for ever and ever; and that made it all right, of course. Besides, it didn't hurt you any, because every one knew it was some one else that was going to be boiled.

So it's all right for ministers to swear a blue streak in the pulpit, of course. But the only time Dad ever swore anything to hurt was once when we had just got moved; and Dad was looking over his books and found there was a Xenophon missing; and speechless with horror, Dad turns to Mother and says, "God, Mother, the only Xenophon we had in the house!"

Well, I didn't blame Dad for that, mind you; because, what is home without a Xenophon? But the next minute, I discovered that those movers had lost one of my skates; and I up and mentioned a place where they don't need any skates, because it never freezes over. And Dad turned on me and said reprovingly that if we *must* mention that bourne from which no traveller returns, we had better say hades. So I will say it, although the other word is more popular.

So, of course, it wouldn't do to put down all Dave's language in black and white, when a few blankety-

blanks will do just as well. But as this method would do injustice to the ginger in Dave's style, I will now and then throw in a few specimens where they will do the most good.

I said to Mother that Dave was a good-natured swearer, anyhow, and just swore out of pure benevolence; but Mother said that was no excuse for him; because, she believed it was wickeder to swear when you *weren't* mad than when you *were*. If you were mad, she said, there might be some excuse for cuss words; but what excuse was there for sending a man to the continental bow-wows in cold blood? — or words to that effect.

"That's all right, Mother," says I; "but which would you rather have a man say to you: 'Hang you, old boy, how are you?' or 'Hang you, you son of a gun, go to the continental bow-wows and be —"

"There, there, that'll do!" says Mother. "I can see your point without so much illustration," says she.

"Well, the first is the way Dave swears," says I; "and the last is the way the rest of us swear; and give me Dave's way, *I* say, if I've got to choose."

"But you haven't got to choose," says Mother. "Just remember that; and even if there were a hundred more ways of making a fool of yourself, you wouldn't have to choose any of them. Now I want two pails of water right away."

Which is the style in which "O woman in our hours of ease" will generally end an argument which is going against her.

Well, Dad said we all had our inconsistencies; and I should say we had.

Take Dad himself, for instance! Dad was inconsistent about nearly everything, but his star performance was in the bean line.

As already seen, Dad was a radical reformer on the subject of beans and pie and several other things; and whenever he saw one of them on the table in front of him, he'd look at them unfavorably and say: "Well, the rest of you may be able to eat those things; but as for me," says he, "I attribute all my health and happiness to the fact that I don't eat beans."

And then, after he had enjoyed that sensation long enough, a magnanimous expression would illuminate his countenance (as Emerson would put it), and he would reach out his plate and say: "Oh, well, just for this once, maybe, I'll take a few." And then, if he didn't clean out the bean-pot, the rest of us were lucky.

Well, Dad's way of not eating beans was so instructive that, by and by, the rest of us began to go without in the same way; and I would say, "Just to illustrate the baleful effects of the pie habit, I'll trouble you for what there is left of it."

And Tad would say, "Mother, gimme some more beans, and I'll show you how I hate 'em."

And even Emerson would get out the dictionary and solemnly enunciate a few syllogisms like this one: —

"Mother," says he, "if I should abstain from all complicity in pie for one day in the year, would that constitute a claim to abnegation?"

Well, along about here, Dad would swallow a cup of hot tea at one gulp and give a hasty scrub at his mustache with his napkin and get up and say, "Ahem, I've got some work to do up stairs." And then he would skip off up to his study, leaving the rest of us a-teeheeing behind him.

And yet, in spite of all you could do, you could never persuade Dad that he wasn't a total abstainer from beans! And there were a lot of other abstainers of the same kind in Belle Isle. But what could you expect when Dad himself would behave in that way about beans? And yet, they all jumped on Dave Nickerson for not abstaining from swearing, only twelve weeks, which was the longest that anything was ever abstained from in Belle Isle. And that was the kind of angels *we* were.

But anyhow, Kitty was there; and Bill and Irene and Alice Dodge and Tommy and Mildred and Sam Gerry and Charlie Taggart and Charlie Barlow and Eli Teak and Hal Goodrich and all our crowd that had such good times together.

And there were also Tad and Emerson and the small fry who were too young for us; and a lot of others who were too old for us, though some of them were pretty nice girls, too, like Ethel Pearson and Nellie Fenton, who both looked quite young and pretty and well-preserved, though they *were* going on twenty! We had nothing against those girls except their age; and we often said it was too bad they were so old, because Nellie was an awfully nice girl; and Ethel, too, who, besides being nice, was the prettiest girl in town, of her *age*, and sang "The Old Oaken Bucket" at temperance meetings, to give us a taste for water. But I had just as lief hear Kitty; and Bill said that Irene had the most musical ability.

And then there were the salt of the earth, such as Amsy Jenks and his wife, and Miss Grey and Elder Pritchard and Dad and Mother, to say nothing of Mr. and Mrs. Dr. Barker, and the Gerrys and Fentons, and Goodriches, and Bloods, and a whole lot of the smartest people in the U.S. to make things lively; and it *was* a pretty good little town to live in after the snow melted and the mud dried up and the river was open and the fishing began and swimming time came, and our base-ball club began to practise, and the picnic season set in, and so on. And even in winter it wasn't so bad, with the big roaring fires and concerts and dramatics and temperance lectures and dances and sociables and

coasting parties on Academy hill: and then along in spring, when the crust would bear a horse, there was fun on Mason's hill above our house: and you took down the top rails from the fences and slid nearly a mile down over Wilson's knoll and across the Wilson field at the bottom. And after that it was sap time, and the sugar camps got to going, and you could dabble around and eat maple candy and syrup and sugar till you were sick and calling for pickles. And I suppose *that* is the reason there is so much pickle in this life; to keep you from getting sick of the sugar. Only, you will notice that a little pickle will go a good ways, whereas, sometimes it looked as if Belle Isle was a regular pickle barrel with a few cakes of sugar floating around on top; and thereby hangs a tale, as the poet says.



CHAPTER XXIII

LEADING AN HONEST LIFE

SUMMER in Belle Isle was short and sweet, like a walk home with the right girl. It began all of a sudden, about June first, and jumped out of winter like a trout out of a brook, and looked about as pretty and stayed about as long, so that you made the most of it while it lasted.

Dad had a sermon about "The Glory of the June-time," which he delivered about once a year under different titles and with different illustrations, and so on; but it was always the same sermon, and the people always liked it first-rate, and said: "That was the kind of thing we wanted"; and maybe it was; because, as Mother said, there was nothing in it that any one could object to.

Dad would crack Nature 'way up in that sermon, and show what a lot of nice things there were in her for us to imitate. All the same, I couldn't help but reflect on all the thunder and lightning and conniption fits that we had to put up with from old Nature, when she got on a tear and carried on like all-possessed, till it *did*

seem as if there wasn't so very much difference between her and us; and maybe that was just what ailed us?

Of course the *June*-time was all right; but didn't the Belle Islers have their June-times too, when they acted so nice that you would think their wings were sprouting this time, sure? And the next you knew, it would be thunder and lightning and business and politics and rum and revivals, and so on!

But of course it would never do to preach that way to the Belle Islers, because if you did, they would think they could turn themselves loose all the time.

And anyhow, that sermon always sent people home feeling first-rate, so that maybe they ate their dinners without grumbling; and that is about all you can expect from one sermon, and you are lucky if you achieve that much. You can work anywhere from a month to six weeks getting up a sermon on brotherly love, and on the way home from hearing it, half the congregation will need a policeman to keep them from pulling hair. I have been in the ministry ever since I was born, and you can bet your bottom dollar that the above is the truth.

Such being the case, I decided that it was no use wasting your sweet young life on reform, when the fish were beginning to bite.

"It's no use, Bill," says I. "Here we've been giving ourselves freely for human welfare, by showing up the cussedness of this town, and what is the result? Are

they grateful to us?" says I. "And are business and politics and rum, and so on, any less popular than ever?"

"Well, I should say not!" says Bill.

"Well, then, what's the use?" says I. "I'm going to quit writing for the 'Star' and let everything go to thunder."

Bill said he felt the same way, and had for some time. "People," says Bill, "are so constituted that the more cussedness they can get into, the better they feel. Tell you what," says Bill, "let's get our guns and all the grub we can scare up and go up to Mason's grove and lead an honest life for a spell! We need something to rest and recuperate us for the fall campaign!" says he.

I saw that Bill was right, and that an honest life was what we needed; so we went and got Charlie Barlow and Tommy Dodge and planned the whole thing out. We agreed to meet at a clump of spruces in Mason's grove, which was about a mile out of town above our house, and bring along plenty of blankets and all the plunder we could lift; and about two hours later we staggered into camp, one by one, and each of us had a load of stuff bigger than he was himself.

Charlie had a couple of spring chickens which had been running loose in the yard and bothering the neighbors; and so he thought it would be a good deed to quietly knock them on the head and bring them along.

And Bill had a lot of pie and doughnuts which he said were ruining his family's digestion; and, so, he had benevolently nabbed them, while his mother was at the ladies' circle for the benefit of the heathen, and had brought them up here where they would do no particular harm.

Well, when I saw how Bill and Charlie had procured their provisions, I gave them a steer about how I had got mine by crawling through the cellar window, and so on; but every word of it was a big lie; because Mother had loaded me up with everything I had, and asked me if there wasn't something more I needed; only, of course I was ashamed to let the boys know I had come by my plunder honestly, when they had earned all theirs by ragging it.

And Tommy Dodge was in the same fix as I was; only he wasn't smart enough to invent a steer, but just had to own up and say regretfully: —

"Well," says he, "I *had* to pay for that coffee and butter and salt pork at the store; and Mother gave me all the rest of it," says Tommy, sadly.

"That's all right, Tommy," says Bill. "We know you *would* have ragged them, if you'd had to."

That cheered Tommy up some; and then to console him some more, Bill sent him down to borrow some potatoes out of Tub Wilkins's patch; and when Tommy came back with a peck or so, you could see that he had

regained his self-respect and felt as good as any of us. And that shows how kind and considerate Bill always was about little things.

Well, we built the camp under a clump of spruces by resting a long pole on the crotches of two trees for a ridge-pole, and leaning other poles against it for rafters, and then thatching the sides with spruce boughs in case it rained, and leaving one end open to the camp-fire. Then we built the fire and swung the kettle and cut up the chickens and threw them in for a stew, along with potatoes and some onions that we found coming along, and butter and salt and pepper. And Bill made the coffee and I boiled the eggs; and in about an hour we had the supper of our lives. I never knew things to taste so good, from chicken to pie; and we could feel ourselves improving morally, every minute.

After supper, we lighted some cigars that Bill had borrowed out of a box of his brother Sid's, and sat down to smoke in front of the fire and discuss the wickedness of civilization as compared to the simple and honest life we were leading.

As Dad had always licked me faithfully for smoking, the result was that I could now smoke without getting sick or getting licked, either.

"Now," says Bill, "ain't this a lot better than civilization? And yet, those people down at the village think they are smart!"

"Well," says Tommy Dodge, "some of 'em *are* smarter than others."

"Yes, that's so," says Bill, "but which one of 'em? That's what gets *me*!"

"How about Arthur Wiley?" says I. "He took a lot of our chairs to fix, and got rid of 'em for old junk, and made Dad buy a lot of good-for-nothing ones at a sacrifice."

"Oh, that's nothing for him," says Charlie. "Arthur can take a lot of old rotten buggies and putty up the holes in 'em and paint and varnish 'em up nice and pretty, and then take 'em up to Madewaska and sell 'em to the Frenchmen for all they've got."

"Yes, Arthur is pretty smart," says Bill; "but look at old John Skinner with his mouth wide open like a crocodile! You'd think, if you looked down old John's throat far enough, you could see the farms and mortgages he'd swallowed. Old John uses a farm just the way you do a bait. He just baits his hook with it and throws out and catches a sucker and drops him in the basket; and then baits up again with the same old farm and throws out for another — hullo, what's that?" says Bill, stopping all of a sudden and listening with both ears.

We grabbed up our guns, so as to let drive at anything that showed its head, and all listened together; but all was still; and there was no sound but the sighing

of the winds in the tree-tops, as a girl would say in a composition.

"Thought I heard something out there in the bushes," says Bill.

"Maybe it was a bear?" says Charlie Barlow, hopefully.

"All right, if it was nothing but a bear," says Bill. "Thought maybe it was old John Skinner come to collect our rent."

Well, we laughed so hard at the idea of old John collecting rent on that wigwam, that you could hear us clear over to Tub Wilkins's hotel; but come to think of it, it wasn't so very funny after all, because old John collected rent on worse places, right along, as Charlie said.

"Yes," says Bill, "things are always coming old John's way, somehow. Ever hear how he got the old Peterson farm for nothing? Well, it was this way: Old Mr. and Mrs. Peterson got too old to work, and the children were all dead; and every one they let the farm to would beat them out of the rent; so they went to old John Skinner and agreed to give him the whole farm if he'd keep 'em the rest of their days; and at last old John agreed to do it, after he'd made sure they had asthma and lung trouble and kidney disease and dyspepsia and senile debility and all the fatal diseases they could hold. Well, the papers were



just barely drawn up, and two meals of old John's victuals inside of the old people, when both of 'em up and died and left everything to old John."

"Gosh!" says Charlie. "A farm for two meals of victuals!"

"Yes, old John is always lucky," says Bill. "Providence is on his side, and no mistake. Some said old John's victuals didn't agree with the old folks; but anyhow they died; and all old John had to do was to bury 'em as cheap as possible. I was down at the shop the day he ordered the old lady's coffin, and he was awful nervous for fear he'd lose a cent, and stood over Dan McQueery rubbing his horny old hands, and puttering around and showing Dan how to make the coffin out of nothing, the way God made the world. 'Make a little coffin, Mr. McQueery,' says he; 'just as small and plain and narrow as you can and make it fit. Them rotten boards will do just as well, because they'll rot in the ground, anyhow; and besides,' says he, 'you can putty up the rotten places and put on a little paint and it'll do just as well!' And Dan made the cheapest and rottenest-looking thing he ever made in his life; and then old John kicked on the price!"

"Well," says Tommy Dodge, cautiously, as if civilization was going to tumble, if he didn't look out, "I should say that mebbe, perhaps, that was sort of mean."

"Mean?" says Bill. "Look a-here, Tommy, you

don't want to be saying such rash things as that. You ought to know by this time that nobody can afford to be decent and do business."

"Darn the old skunk, anyhow!" says Charlie Barlow. "If that ain't the rottenest thing yet!"

"Well, I dunno," says Bill. "There's Charlie Rollins, now. Ever hear how he got big insurance on his barns and then had 'em catch fire and burn up in less than a month?"

Tommy said he didn't believe much money could be made that way, because the insurance men would be on to you, after a while; but Bill said: "Oh, well, you could make what there was in it, and then think up something else that was equally rotten. Anyhow, Charlie Rollins was prospering along those lines, and thinking up new methods all the time; and they talked of him for the legislature. And once he gets there," says Bill, "you'll see him make the rest of 'em look like a Sunday School."

"Legislature! Huh!" says Charlie Barlow. "Hell is the best place for *him!*"

"Well, what's the difference?" says Bill. "Besides, there ain't any hell nowadays — nothing but the legislature; and that's why it's getting so crowded, I guess, with all our smartest men."

"Then why don't they send Deacon Goodrich?" says Tommy. "Or else Jim Cheatham, one or the other? Ain't they doing the biggest business in this

town? Yes, sir! And that's why they got every one down on them, when they're all of 'em doing the same things, only not quite so good."

"That's so," says Bill. "As I look at it, the Deacon is just a man who has done better what the rest of us have done well; so what are we kicking about? Somebody's got to be the smartest Elik, anyhow; and it might as well be the Deacon as any one."

This suited Tommy and all of us; and there didn't seem to be anything left to be said on the subject.

And then we all of us sat and thought how smart the Deacon was and how little we had done in the same line, and how we had got to hump ourselves, if we ever expected to succeed.

At last Tommy heaved a sigh, and said he supposed we were all of us wasting time fooling around here in the camp, when we ought to be down town a-hustling. And Charlie Barlow said, Oh, your grandmother! He didn't give a continental who made money and who didn't; he was going to enjoy himself a little, and treat every one as near right as possible, and let it go at that.

Well, we treated Charlie's views respectfully; but it was easy to see that he never would be sent to Congress on those lines; because they don't look for legislative timber among those who are unsound in their business principles.

"Well," says Bill, at last, "as I look at it, there are

three degrees of smartness in this town: smart, smarter than lightning, and too smart for your boots; and most of us have taken the third degree."

"Well, I dunno," says Tommy, "whether we have or not. There are smart men in this town, and no mistake; but they ain't nothing compared to Jewem and Pinchem of Bangor. Look at what they're up to, will you? They've got a big lumber deal on that'll take a million dollars to carry through; and they're paying off their men in notes of hand that they got up themselves to look like money, so you can hand it around if you want to; and the result is," says Tommy, "that every one is taking it, and it passes just like greenbacks; and the result of *that* is that business is picking up right along; because, what this town needed was more circulating medium," says he.

"Then why didn't you vote the Greenback ticket?" says I, with withering scorn.

"Because," says Tommy, "we don't want any more rag money in this town. Greenbacks are dangerous to the country," says he, "but *anybody's* got a right to pass around his note of hand, ain't he? Yes, sir! And if it does just as well, what's the odds?"

"Well," says I, "if that don't beat a campaign argument for pure brilliancy! You smart Eliks were so down on greenbacks and calling 'em rag money, and so on; and now where are we? The guarantee of

Uncle Sam wasn't good enough for you," says I, "and now you take the guarantee of two sharpers from Bangor and swallow their stuff by the ton: and that's what the 'Sunrise' calls a conservative business proposition!"

"Well," says Tommy, kind of mad because I had him, "I didn't come up here in the woods to talk politics. All I say is that Jewem and Pinchem are smarter than any men we've got in this town, or else some of 'em would have worked the game themselves, wouldn't they? I just as lief have greenbacks," says Tommy, generously; "only, seeing we ain't got 'em, I say it was smart of Jewem and Pinchem to supply the demand and make a good thing out of it for themselves."

"Yes," says I, "and it was smart of them to howl against greenbacks the way they did in the campaign, so that afterwards they could dump a whole paper mill on us! Oh, yes, they're smart, and no mistake!"

Well, we came pretty near quarrelling over that subject; but at last we all agreed that Jewem and Pinchem were a little bit smarter than anything we had produced yet; and Bill said we were going to realize it, before very long. I asked Bill what he meant by that, but he said, oh, nothing; it was just an idea he had.

"Well, where would we be if we were all of us strictly honest?" says Tommy Dodge, after a long period of reflection. "Nobody would make any money, would they? And then nobody would have anything to give

to churches, and so on; and business would suffer and commercial stagnation would set in! Besides, look at us!" says he. "Didn't we lift nearly everything we've got? Yes, sir! Of course I didn't lift much myself," says Tommy, modestly; "and yet, some say I am too smart!" says he in an injured tone.

"Oh, no," says Bill, lighting up a fresh cigar of his brother Sid's; "you ain't so awfully smart, Tommy; so don't you worry about that."

Well, Tommy studied over that a while, and finally he said: "Well, I don't want to be any smarter than I ought to be; but you've *got* to be as smart as the next man in order to live, ain't you?"

"That's so," says Bill. "You can't afford to be an angel yet awhile in this town. Only what beats me," says he, "is what they want of ministers to preach to 'em about honesty, and so on, when they don't intend to have anything to do with it! There's old Elder Pritchard, now! He believes that the whole world belongs to the devil, anyhow; and the best we can do is to snatch brands from the burning. And Dick's father believes that the world don't belong to the devil, even if he *has* got it; and so the proper thing is to snatch the world away from the devil; but thus far, the devil seems to be having a picnic with both of 'em," says Bill.

Well, we talked it over for an hour or so, and then gave it up and went to bed and slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF AN HONEST LIFE

IT rained a little in the night, but not enough to hurt anything: and next morning we were up bright and early and had breakfast in hot coffee and eggs and sweet potatoes and doughnuts and pie: and afterwards we all felt fine and free and first-rate: and we agreed that the world would be all right if we could live like this all the time, and never have anything to do with work or school or business or politics or rum or religion.

Along about nine o'clock, we got out the guns and went hunting for partridges, intending to have them for dinner instead of chickens; but when we got back to camp without any partridges and with appetites like old John Skinner's for his fellow-men, we found to our horror and indignation that Tad and Emerson and the two Jenks boys had been around and gobbled everything in sight; and there they stood, about half a mile off, and laughed and crowed and twiddled their fingers at us from the ends of their noses!

"Boys," says Bill, "are we going to stand this? Here we come off up here in the woods to get away from civilization and lead an honest life, only to find ourselves

pursued and plundered of the fruits of our honest toil by the sons of pickpockets from which we fled! Let's go for 'em!" says Bill; and we did.

Bill and Charlie chased the two Jenks boys, who had the longest legs, and Tommy took after Emerson, and I after Tad; and they all scattered like partridges, and we after them, like bloodhounds on the trail.



I CHASED TAD.

I chased Tad up hill and down and through a raspberry patch and across Tub Wilkins's potato field and down the road to our house on the dead run, I telling him the horrible things I was going to do to him; and we burst into the front door about the same time, just as Emerson staggered in through the back one.

And Emerson ran in and got with his back to a corner and prepared to die hard again. "Come one, come all!" says he, and so on. And Tad got in the other corner and swore he could lick two of me. It was a gallant sight, but I had spared them once too often, and their hour was come.



"Now I've got 'em both!" says I; "and we'll see whether they'll rob any more camps or not."

"Hold on, there," says Dad, appearing on the scene all of a sudden. "What's all this about?"

"They robbed our camp," says I; "and now I've got a right to maul the both of 'em!"

"They hooked nearly everything they had, themselves!" shouts Emerson, forgetting all his big words. "We heard 'em say so, last night, when we hid in the bushes!"

"Yes," says I, "and we came near shooting 'em; and now I wish we *had!*"

"Oh, ho!" says Dad. "Then you *did* steal everything you had!"

"Yes, sir!" says Tad. "We heard 'em all crowing about it last night; and we thought we'd show 'em we were just as smart as they were."

"Well, *I* didn't hook anything," says I, "and Mother knows it!"

"Yes, but you ate what the others got, didn't you? I'll warrant you did. Now we'll settle it this way," says Dad; "Dick can attend to Tad and Emerson, if he wants to; only, afterwards, I shall attend to him about twice as thoroughly for setting them a bad example."

Then Emerson shouted more poetry, and Mother said it wasn't fair, and Tad dared me to come on; so

I said, "Oh, I didn't want to maul 'em. We were just chasing 'em for fun."

"All right," says Dad, looking as pleased with himself as Solomon was, after he proposed to divide up the baby. "Then," says Dad, "as you all seem to deserve about the same, I shall put the whole of you to hard labor on the woodpile for the rest of the day."

Well, when Tad and Emerson saw what they had brought on themselves, I guess they wished they had either been honest or kept mum, one or the other; and Emerson turned tragically to his mother and said in accents of despair: "Must I, Mother? *Must I?* Then — I *will*."

And Tad also had a howl that he raised at such times; and now, when he saw that awful woodpile awaiting him, he exclaimed in his agony: "Oh," says Tad, "I wisht I was Nate Coville! I'd do nothing but eat my vittles!" (because, you understand, that was all Nate had to do, his father being so well fixed).

And Dad laughed heartlessly at us, and so did Mother and Irene, and there was no pity in their flinty hearts; and we had to sweat it out like convicts for the rest of that day; and it was all Tad's and Emerson's fault.

But Bill and Charlie caught the Jenks boys, and gave them their just deserts, and made them promise to lead an honest life, or they would duck them in a bog hole; and that was some comfort.

So now I know how the children of Israel felt, the time they borrowed a few things from the Egyptians (who had skinned it all out of *them* in the first place, mind you), and with these few things, which were theirs by rights, had started out to lead an honest life. And old Pharaoh chased them to make them come back and sweat it out on the woodpile (I mean the brick yard), so he could skin enough out of them for benevolent purposes and monuments to himself. Only he didn't succeed in business that time, because the Lord drowned the whole posse lot of them in the Red Sea. And if the Lord would do a few more stunts of that kind, I would be glad to read about it, if it *was* in the Bible.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW TO TREAT A BROTHER

WELL, that was *one* time that Tad and Emerson got a little the best of me; and it wasn't the only time, either, so that as things were going, I began to wonder who would be running this family before long.

Now, of course, you understand that we all recognized that Emerson was the genius of the family, as it was easy to see from his command of language. And then again, a phrenologist had once come along and examined all our heads and found more in Emerson's than even in mine; and told us to be careful of that boy, because the day would surely come when he would cause Vanderbilt to tremble at the mere mention of his name. So, when that day came, I wanted Emerson to be grateful to me and remember who it was that gave him his first lessons in life.

And every now and then, he would enunciate an aphorism that would stagger you, and prove how his brain power was coming along.

For instance, among the ponderous tomes that he

would read, was one that was called "A Library of Poetry and Song," with a good many poems in it marked "Anon.," which, you understand, means anonymous. Well, Emerson looked the book over awhile, and finally he comes to Mother and says, "Mother," says he, "this *Anon* is one of the best poets in the book."

And Mother exclaims, "My, but if that child ever lives to grow up!" And Dad expands with pride, and says, "Emerson, my son, that remark of yours gives me my subject for next Sunday."

And sure enough, next Sunday he preaches on "The Unknown Great," and proves by Emerson's remark, and a lot of other examples, that Anon is the author of pretty nearly everything, and that the lesson for us is to go and do likewise, no matter if nobody ever knows about it but God, and he won't tell.

So there you are! And people said it was one of Dad's greatest efforts; and it was all owing to Emerson; and I hadn't done a thing to inspire Dad, except with objurgations on business astuteness, which were imperilling the income of this family.

Well, it was easy to see that Emerson's name was striking in more than mine was, and that some day I would have to be proud of the relationship, if I didn't look out.

And the same with Tad, who was growing so fast

that already it was all I could do to handle him, and even Dad was beginning to use moral suasion on him; and Tad was wearing out his clothes so fast that I had to give up some of mine to him, and have new ones instead. And then Tad was so ungrateful that he wanted the new ones himself!

And there was a friend of mine named Pete La Salle, a big, good-natured young Frenchman that I played the violin with, and who could knock the stuffing out of Paul Plunkett; and when I told Pete how fast Tad wore out his clothes, Pete spoke up quicker than a wink and said, "He be a bigger man than you be."

Well, at first I laughed the idea to scorn, and told Pete how easy I could throw Tad (stretching it a little in my indignation, of course), but Pete only wagged his head and said: "You wait. Byme bye, he throw *you*."

And the more I thought it over, the more probable it seemed that Pete was right, and that at the rate Tad was wearing out his clothes and Emerson his vocabulary, the both of them would soon be throwing me in more ways than one; and that the only way was to make hay while the sun shone, and strike so much terror and awe into them that it would last them their lifetime.

So I never lost a chance to reduce them to submission and make them look up to their natural superior in wisdom and prowess and virtue; and the result was

that Bill said he never saw any one so much respected by his brothers as I was.

And that reminds me that the first time I ever set eyes on Bill, I happened to be mauling Tad for something, and just then Bill came along and sung out, "Hold on, there," says he. "What you mauling him for?"

Well, I let up on Tad long enough to remark scornfully to Bill: "What are you giving us? Ain't he my brother?"

"That so!" says Bill. "Then I'll be a brother to you the same way."

And then he sailed in and was giving me all I could do and a little more, when Tad rose up from the dirt and came to my assistance; and together we managed to persuade Bill that it was a mistake to meddle in family matters.

So after that, Bill and I got more and more friendly (especially when he found out that Irene was my sister); and Bill said afterwards to me that this world was chock full of the above kind of brotherliness, and that when any one tried to interfere and stop it, the whole of them would club together and maul him to death.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GREAT ADVENTURE OF EMERSON AND PHIL JENKS

WHICH reminds me of the great adventure of Emerson and Phil Jenks, the time they became weary of tyranny and oppression at the hands of Dad and Amsy and me and Tad and all others in authority, and decided to leave home and go to Holton, which was only about forty miles away, and seek their fortunes with an old pistol and three cents in change. And their plan was to hold up the people they met on the road at the muzzle of the pistol, which wasn't loaded, and wouldn't go off if it was, not having any hammer or trigger; and so make enough to go into business with when they got to Holton.

Well, it was a noble and gallant enterprise and ought to have worked, considering it was the same one that was working like clockwork all over Belle Isle; but alas! the trouble was that when they met the stage, about a quarter of a mile down the road, and told them to throw up their hands, the whole stage-load nearly split their sides with laughing, and the driver nearly

fell off of the seat, and the whole of them drove into town in a helpless condition.

And Henry Gilly, who was driving along behind the stage, pulls up at the sight of Emerson and Phil and sings out, "Hello, if there ain't two Belle Islers, then I'm a Christian!" says he.

Well, Emerson and Phil were discouraged, and sat down in despair and refused to be comforted by Henry, who argued with them that they had better give up robbing the public till they were old enough to do it legally. So at last they guessed Henry was about right; and climbed in with him and drove back to town. And Henry drove up with them to our house, and dropped them in the front yard. And Dad came out to see what was up, and he and Henry talked it over and laughed and chuckled and slapped their knees till they were sore.

"Hi, hi, hi," says Dad, as Emerson came in. "Started for Holton and only got a quarter of a mile! Well, if that ain't human nature all over! Going to hold them up and go into business! Great head, great head!"

And off he skips for his study; and sure enough, next Sunday he comes out with a sermon on old What's-his-name in the Bible, who started for What-do-you-call-it, and only got a quarter of a mile and sat down and rested the rest of his life. And Dad said he was

led to his theme by a recent juvenile adventure, now celebrated in local history.

And then they all grinned from ear to ear and looked at Emerson and Phil Jenks; but Dad had them laughing out of the other side of their mouth in about half a minute. He said that such was life. People were always starting out to do great things, he said, and then getting stuck about a quarter of a mile from home. He showed them that we were all of us only about a quarter of a mile from the savages, and already we had sat down to rest. Hadn't we better get up and move along towards What-do-you-call-it, after we had got good and rested? And then he proceeded to show them what legs were made for and what a lot of muscle we had on tap and how nice it would be to get to What-do-you-call-it, which was a place where Belle Islers had wings.

Well, when it came to that, I simply drew the line; because anybody could see that the Belle Islers would never have wings except, maybe, after they were dead; and even then, I wouldn't want to risk any money on it; and I guess the whole of them agreed with me, judging by the way they did business next week.

Besides, Dad failed to explain how we were going to get to What-do-you-call-it by holding people up. But every one said it was a great sermon; and Amsy Jenks got more off his guard than ever, and the result

was that somebody stole his overcoat while his back was turned; and that is what comes of putting your trust in sermons.

If *I* was preaching to Belle Islers, I would take some such text as, "If the good man of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have waited for him with a shot-gun," or words to that effect; because, *that* would be something they could take home with them. But as for that sermon of Dad's, — well, you would *think* that after a sermon like that, everybody would proceed to get a move on them and move right into the next century, now, wouldn't you? Well, we shall now see whether they did or not.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CHURCH FAIR

WELL, it was time for the annual church fair; and all the women had been sewing and talking ever since the last one, which was voted a financial success because it had cleared about two hundred dollars on an investment of ten, which was considered a fair profit in Belle Isle. But this time they were bound to do better than ever; so Mother, who was Secretary of the Circle, had written to all the other circles in the United States, requesting them to send on such articles as they could dispense with for the good of the cause. And meanwhile, the usual outfit of grab-bags and guess-cakes and bean-bottles and fish-ponds and mystery-tables and betting books, and so on, were got ready; and Dave Nickerson said they could count on him to place a few bets, because anything he could do in that line, the church was welcome to.

Well, as I was saying, Mother's appeal to the other churches netted us a barrel or so of ornamental tray-cloths and frescoed pillow covers and all that kind of

flamgorgeous necessities for women, and not a thing for us men, mind you! And yet, we keep right on calling women the unselfish sex, and writing poems about fair women, and so on! But as for me, I would like to write a poem about *church*-fair women; and I'll bet when I got through, about all the poets would strike work and write about the Indians for a spell.

Well, it was those frescoed and flamgorgeous things from outside that proved too much for some of our leading church-fair women, and showed that financial astuteness is not confined to men, or anything like it. Men can figure out how to get something for next to nothing; but when the problem is how to get it for absolutely nothing whatever, and a little thrown in for good measure, it takes the fair sex to show you how.

And this is the way they did it. I shall mention no names in the interest of society and religion and our best families; but will merely state that a few of the wives of our noblest and best financiers simply put their heads together and marked the most frescoed and flamgorgeous things up to famine prices, where nobody could touch them with a ten-foot pole, and then calmly waited the whole evening in the full assurance that virtue would get its reward, which it did. People would come along and look longingly at those things, and the famine prices on them, and then pass on with a bitter sigh to purchase a ten-cent flatiron holder, or things of that

kind, which are made out of nothing and are clear profit. And yet, Henry Gilly says that God himself couldn't do such a thing!

And Dave Nickerson came in with a smile on him and gave a squint up at the angels to make sure that they were on to it, too; and then he inquired where the poker table was. And Iyee Wowo laughed delightedly at him and said, there wasn't any poker table this time; but there was a mystery-table, which was the one she was presiding at. And Dave said, that was all the same to him; and then he placed a quarter on a box which, on being opened, proved to contain a cunning little suit of doll clothes, — just what he wanted, Dave said. And then he placed another quarter and got a doll to go with the clothes. And everybody laughed pitilessly at him; and then old Mr. Gerry tried his luck and drew a box of face powder; and it was Dave's turn to haw-haw. And Eli Teak was the next victim, and got stuck on a lot of hairpins; which he said he would give to any girl who would have him; but nobody took him up; and so forth and so on. You'd have thought by the way those noble and unselfish men marched up and took their medicine that it was fun to be butchered to make a Roman holiday! But then, of course, they had all come prepared to get beat, and got just what they expected, which is more than most of us get in this world.

And meanwhile, the others were nobly patronizing the grab-bag and the guess-cake, and so on, and writing up the betting book for a sofa pillow (which mysteriously fell to the family that kept the book; and therefore I mention no names in the interest of society). But as for me, I sternly waved all those girls away who were smiling at me from behind their contumacious frauds, and devoted myself to the ice-cream table, where you stood something of a show for your money. But Bill acted like a regular nincompoop, and let himself get victimized by Iyee Wowo and Mildred and Alice and all of them; but especially Iyee Wowo, and she said afterwards that *that* was the way she liked to see a man behave. And I said, yes, so would I, if I was in her place.

And after the fair, there was a dance to take the taste out of your mouth, and the money out of your pocket, if you had any left. Kitty and Hal came in to this part of the programme; and I was going to ask Kitty to dance with me; only, I wasn't going to be in such a hurry about it that every one would suspect me; and so, I waited so long that Kitty's card was full by the time I got around; and once more had I missed it again, as usual. Of course, Kitty said she was sorry; but that is what girls always say when they are pleased to think that you have got what you deserved.

This made me more down on fairs than ever, of course,

and — oh, well, as every one has attended no end of them, there is no use prolonging the agony of this one, except to state that it was an unprecedented success, as you could easily tell by feeling in your pockets. And — oh, yes, they *did* announce that the cake had been drawn by Eli Teak, who promptly and nobly presented it to Mother, who instantly invited him up to supper the next evening.

And the best guess on the bean-bottle was by Dave Nickerson. Prize, a copy of the Holy Bible. And my, such a yell as went up to the roof of Goodrich Hall when that prize was declared! Dave said it was the biggest horse on him that ever happened. Something like presenting the Devil with a bottle of holy water, Dave said; but mebbe he could swap it off with Jim Cheatham (who had donated it out of an unsalable lot), for a plug of tobacco, or something.

So Dave came the nearest of any one to getting his money's worth; but Bill and I never drew a thing; not even a Bible! And what's more, I never *did* draw a thing at one of those fairs, although I have been to thousands of them, and bet enough money to make me a Crœsus, if I had had as much sense as a kangaroo, and had staid at home in my den.

And as for those things with the famine prices, there were no purchasers, of course; and so, the things were quietly divided up among the elect, who shall be name-

less, as Mother would never reveal their names, for fear of what I would do to them; and besides, as Dad said, such things had best be buried in oblivion.

"Well, Dad," says I, that night, after all was over and the cash was counted and the women were sleeping the sleep of the just, with the plunder under their pillows, "well, Dad," says I, "great progress you're making, reforming that fair!"

Dad hemmed and hawed and explained that he had so many other reforms on hand that he hadn't got round to the fair yet.

"Oh, no hurry," says I. "A thousand years or so from now will do just as well. Wonderful progress we're making, Dad!"

"Fudge, fudge," says Dad. "You expect everything to be done in no time! We must not be too sudden and precipitate," says he.

"That's so," says I. "The thing for us to do is to hold them back with both hands, or they'll rush right into heaven and crowd out the angels. And, after all, Dad, I don't know that I would advise you to abolish that fair," says I; "because, where will you get such an exhibition of unselfishness and Christian charity as was displayed by those men in gambling away their last cent for the good of religion? They may talk all they've a mind to, Dad, about social salvation proceeding from the female sex; but the events of this night

have proved to me that our mothers, wives, sisters, and sweethearts can give us cards and spades on the secret of financial success."

"You wait till Kitty hears of that!" says Iyee Wowo, revengefully.

"Go ahead and tell her!" says I. "Talk about the female sex as a pure spring of unpolluted idealism!" says I. "Why, Dad, even old John Skinner himself never got away with such a load of plunder as those unpolluted idealists!" says I.

"Look here, now," says Dad, "your Mother hasn't got any of those frescoed things, has she?"

"No," says I; "but why? Because she's the minister's wife; and you know, yourself, Dad, that ministers' families never *are* let in on any good thing."

Then Mother's heart broke, and she said with tears in her eyes, "Now, Dick!" says she, "aren't you ashamed to talk so about your own mother and sister, when we both of us worked so hard to get those things for the fair, and were *so* disappointed and *so* ashamed to think what became of them! And so were ever so many of us; but what could *we* do? Those others didn't know any better —"

"Yes, that's it!" says Dad, looking relieved. "They didn't know any better. That explains it!"

"Yes," says I; "and that explains Ali Baba and the

forty thieves, and Jacob and Esau, and old John Skinner and the whole United States."

"Yes," says Iyee Wowo, "and it explains why Dick never bought a thing but ice-cream!"

To which I retorted, "Yes, and it *also* explains why Irene smiled all the cash out of Bill's pocket!"

"Well, Kitty didn't smile much out of Dick's pocket," says she. "Oh, wouldn't I be ashamed to be such a meany!"

Well, that was *one* time that Iyee Wowo got a little the best of me; because, just as I had nearly thought up a crushing rejoinder, Dad broke in and spoiled everything.

"Oh, well," says Dad, wearily, "I'm tired; and I guess we better all go to bed. This church business is too much for me, anyhow," says he; "and I guess it's too much for every one but Dick. *He* can settle it, of course," says Dad, with his usual sarcasm when it came to Dick; "but as for me," says he, "the purification of the moral atmosphere is a good deal bigger job than I thought for when I tackled it. Now the rest of you can sit up all night and settle it any way you like; but as for me, I'm done," says he; and away he skips for tired nature's sweet restorer.

Well, when the guardians of the public morality get so tired and sick of the ineffectual struggle that they have to go to bed and sleep it off, it is time for

the rest of us to follow suit. So I followed Dad upstairs with the sad but consoling reflection that once more had I been too much for him.

Well, it must be painful to be a minister and know where your salary is coming from; only, I guess it would be still more painful *not* to know where it is coming from; so there you are! And it must be *especially* discouraging when you first realize that you have got the female sex on your hands, as well as the male; and that even women haven't been vaccinated against business astuteness!

If I was going to be a minister (which I am *not*, while there are any jobs left on the road), I would start a special mission to our wives, mothers, sisters, and sweethearts; and I would take for my text, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" and I would endeavor to warm them up with the idea of giving us poor innocent men a show on this mundane sphere. And I would melt them to tears with a long and affecting poem, winding up like this: —

"Only a little hair, ladies,
For my unprotected head!
If you'll only leave it there, ladies,
You may have it after I'm dead."



CHAPTER XXVIII

THE POINT TO DON QUIXOTE

ALONG about the middle of December, as I was up a stump for something to write on, and composition day was nearly due, and politics and business and rum were played out, I went to young Atwell for a subject, and he gave me Don Quixote, whatever *that* was. *I* didn't know any more than the man in the moon. But I wasn't going to betray my ignorance to young Atwell; so I just said thank you, and went and interviewed Bill.

"Bill," says I, "what's Don Quixote: a book, or a billy goat, or what?"

"It's a book," says Bill; "and it's in the library on the top shelf along with Shakespeare and a lot of others that nobody looks at."

"That's bad!" says I. "Because I've got to write on it; but if it ain't any better than Shakespeare —"

"Oh, well," says Bill, "it ain't quite up to Petroleum V. Nasby; but it's as good as 'Les Miserables'; and you can read that all right, if it *is* on the top shelf."

Well, I didn't know what "Les Miserables" was

either; but as I had already betrayed ignorance enough for one day, I decided to get both books out of the library and see for myself if there was anything in them.

Now the reason why I had never read those books before was that Dad had always recommended them to me, whereas experience proves that the best books are those which they will threaten to lick you for reading, such as "Crack-skull Bob, or White Rattlesnake, the Demon of the Lake."

That Crack-skull was a crackerjack, and no mistake, and the way he could thin out the redskins with the butt end of his trusty rifle, after he had expended his last shot, was a caution! And when Crack-skull was hard pressed by the painted fiends, and was about to be scalped at last, suddenly, *White Rattlesnake, the Demon of the Lake*, would appear on the scene; and my, how those redskins would light out for the tall timber!

Well, I used to think that Indians were the only enemies of the human race; but after getting acquainted with the Belle Islers, I saw my mistake; and after reading "Don Quixote," I saw *their* mistake; and this is how I came to see it.

I went down to the library which Dad had started when he first came here; because, the first thing Dad always did the minute he came to town was to start a library, because he said that ignorance was to blame

for everything in this world; and the arch enemy was the arch stupid, and the devil was an ass, and so on.

But I had my doubts about it; and I asked Dad, if ignorance was to blame for all human cussedness, why all our leading citizens were such past masters at skinning you alive.

"Oh," says Dad, "there's a lot of ignorance left over after you've learned how to drive a sharp bargain."

Well, I wasn't precisely sure what Dad meant by that. Maybe he meant me, and maybe he meant the leading citizens. So I waived the point, as he said in his sermons, and told him I was going to write on "Don Quixote."

"Not bad," says Dad. "Not bad! Only, be sure you get the point of it, and not just the mere story."

So I waded into "Don Quixote" and boned it from end to end and found that the point of it was this:—

Don Quixote was a first-rate sort of man who went crazy about chivalry.

Now that was all right, only the Don was as far behind the times as old Elder Pritchard, and got himself up in about the same style, with an old broken-winded, knock-kneed nag with the blind staggers, and a barber's basin for a helmet, and a mutton-headed squire who was a bigger ass than the animal he rode on. And thus arrayed, the Don rode forth with this outfit to charge windmills, and so on.

Well, I failed to perceive why people made so much fuss about that kind of a crazy man; but Dad gave me a pointer to the effect that Cervantes wrote the book to show up the Spanish people and prove what asses they were making of themselves, or words to that effect. They were all of them crazy together, Dad said; and the old Don was the incarnation, or something, of the national spirit; and that was the thing that Cervantes was after, — to smile Spain's chivalry away, as Byron put it. "Only," says Dad, "you don't want to be too hard on the Don; because after all, he was rather a noble old chap; and people are always making fools of themselves in the same way; and that is why the book is a classic," says he.

Well, that gave me an eye-opener, and I immediately saw that the Belle Islers were twice as crazy as Don Quixote and bigger asses than Sancho Panza; and after that, everything was easy. I tell you I enjoyed myself writing that composition.

"Talk about your crazy men," says I, "but if this town is anything better than a lunatic asylum, I beg to be informed. And some are crazy about rum, and some about politics, and so on; and *all* are crazy about business."

"And talk about your windmills! Look at Fourth of July and the way people use up their patriotism on tommyrotism and wishing that some one would tread

on the tails of their coats, so they could show how they love their country! And the next minute, you'll see those same patriots robbing Uncle Sam of his striped pants. But we're no Don Quixotes; oh, no! Catch *us* being such lunatics as to rescue the ladies by mistake, when we can rob the whole coach-load, and then make it all right by dropping a nickel in the contribution box! And that's the kind of chivalrous and up-to-date Dons that *we* are!

Well, I went on in that style for about fifteen pages, ripping the skins off our Dons and showing them how long and furry their ears were; and the stuff fairly flowed from my pen as if I was inspired.

Finally, I burst into song, like Bill Nye, and boiled the whole thing down into a poem; starting with Dad's quotation from Byron (only, I didn't agree with Byron, who thinks that Cervantes did a bad thing to show up the Spanish kind of chivalry; whereas *I* think we need more of the same kind of medicine. So here is the way I put her through:

"'Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away,'
And that's the kind of smile we need to-day.
For all these modern loons and windy frauds
Would raise a horse laugh from the Olympian gods.
Behold Belle Isle upon a lame old nag,
Go jouncing forth to stow away the swag!
Covered from head to foot with gall and brass
And chased by fools like Sancho and his ass!

And as for girls, compared to some I've seen,
Dulcinea Del Tobosa was a queen.
Besides, 'twas love that made the Don a noodle;
But all that ails Belle Isle is love of boodle!
And if we *must* be crazy, then *I* say,
Give *me* the Don who chose the good old way.
Come then, old Muse, that did the job for Spain,
And see what you can do for Belle Isle, Maine.
And maybe when our Dons get back their wits,
They'll laugh as if they had conniption fits!"

Well, I worked hard on that poem out on the kitchen table with Iyee Wowo peeking over my shoulder, and Emerson making sage remarks, and Tad scuffling his feet under the table and taking a fresh bite out of a gingersnap. I tell you, I could sympathize with great poets and the difficulties they labored under to enlighten this astute world, as I was trying to do now. And when I had finished it in spite of the whole family, I showed it to Dad, and he wrinkled up his brow and said, "Well, there was *one* good line in it, and that was the quotation from Byron." And then he chuckled to himself as if he had said something smart, and skipped off up to his study.

I was disgusted with Dad, as I generally was when I showed him one of my masterpieces; so I took this one to Mother, whose taste for poetry was better; and *she* said the poem was all right, and only needed touching up a little in order to be perfect.

"Show me the place that needs it!" says I, indignantly.

"Well, what about these last two lines?" says Mother. "Seems to me it ought to be the laughing that brings back their wits, instead of *vice versa*, oughtn't it?"

"Not on your life!" says I. "It's these melancholy lunatics like Uncle Dan'l Crump that never see anything to laugh at; whereas," says I, "if he had a grain of sense in his noggin wouldn't he go into fits over his kind of honesty? Well, I should say! And, as for the rest of the Belle Islers, the only ray of hope is that they ain't *quite* so far gone that they can't take a joke, if you make it as broad as a barn-door; and all you've got to do is to prove that they are that kind of a joke, and you've got 'em!" says I.

Well, Mother was always more fair-minded than Dad, and more ready to give in beat, if she had to (which was probably because she had no study to dive into every few minutes). So she said she saw my point and I could let those last two lines alone, though she still maintained that humor was the cause of sanity, as well as *vice versa*.

Well, it was lucky I happened to think of that argument, because if I hadn't, I might have had to work on that poem for two days longer; and by that time I would have been a lunatic myself.

So Mother said the poem was all right, and only

needed touching up a little, if I wanted her to try it; and I said, "Certainly, go ahead." So Mother touched it up to suit herself, and when she was through, this is what there was left of it: —

"'Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away!'
And oh that one such smile were ours to-day!
For lo, our bootless jousts and windmill frauds
Are fit to wake the laughter of the gods.
Behold us yet, on Rosinantes lame,
Mounted to spread our dull Dulcinea's fame;
Helmed with a barber's basin wrought of brass
And squired by Sancho Panza and his ass!
Nay, mad for love was he, your knight of old;
But this our knight is mad for lust of gold.
Yea, nobler he that rode to help and stay,
Than he that rides to plunder and betray.
Come, then, O Muse, that stirred Cervantes' powers,
And smile away this chivalry of ours.
So shall our Don his vanished wits regain,
Nor madly break once more his erring lance in vain."

"So *that's* what you call touching it up?" says I. "Fancy *me* reading that before the school and having 'em all say you wrote it for me! No, Mother, honesty is the best policy, and I cannot tell a lie, and so on. "Besides," says I, "you left out that passage about girls, and that's the best thing in it!"

"Oh, no," says Mother. "Poets are often mistaken about their best things. Now I liked some of the other lines better."

"But, Mother," says I, "are we going to let those girls off without a single dig, when they are to blame for everything since the garden of Eden?"

"Yes, that's right!" says Irene, pitching in. "Lay it all on us girls! If you boys steal apples, of course, it's our fault!"

"Course it is!" says I. "That's why we steal 'em — so you girls will ask us for some and look sweet at us for two minutes."

"We never knew that you *stole* them!" says she.

"Well, who said we did? Can't I suppose a case, for instance? The point is, if we *did* steal any, that would be the reason why; and you'd take 'em quick enough and no questions asked; and the more we should steal, for instance, the sweeter you'd smile at us, for instance."

"We wouldn't either. And if we had *dreamed* that you *stole* them, we would have *despised* you!"

"Yes," says I, "that's what you *say;* but when it comes to the point, you don't *dream*, and you don't want to. All you want is the apples and the gum and everything in sight."

"Just listen to him!" says Iyee Wowo, sarcastically. "Oh, he's the sweetest thing, he is! You wait till he gets loose on the country!"

Then Mother said this conversation was getting too personal; and that I had better leave off arguing for to-night and pitch into that Cæsar lesson, instead of Iyee

Wowo. So, I had to let up on her and bone out a piece of Cæsar, in which he told how he robbed and murdered and enslaved about fifty thousand people and pocketed the swag; and the lesson for us was: "Go thou and do likewise."

But Cæsar wasn't crazy, oh, no! Catch *him* rescuing anybody when he could steal the hair off the top of their heads!

Well, I saw that that composition of mine on Don Quixote was needed in this world, especially the poem. So I first tried it on the school, where it was received with loud applause from the peanut gallery and commended by young Atwell as a trenchant commentary on the prevalent philosophy, or words to that effect; and having done that much good with it, I decided to offer it to the "Star," and I didn't care which copy of the poem the Doctor took, either, as long as he took the one that would bite the most chunks out of them, so I carried the whole thing down to the Doctor, and asked him which poem we had better print so as to do the most good in the world; and he looked them both over and chuckled a good deal to himself, and at last he said: —

"Well, Dick," says he, "it's this way, each version of the poem is unapproachable in its way, but I should say that your mother's version would be all right for Boston, and yours would be all right for Belle Isle. Still," says he, "maybe it's just the other way round.

You never can tell anything about Boston or Belle Isle either. Therefore," says he, "the thing to do is to print both of them, so that those who don't get hit by one will succumb to the other; and in that way, we shall bag the whole town," says the Doctor.

Well, I thought that was a pretty good scheme myself; so I told the Doctor to go ahead. And sure enough, when the "Star" came out with that Don Quixote business, there was trouble in town; and the "Sunrise" said that the "Star" had offered another insult to the genius of American institutions and the fair fame of Belle Isle; and that, as usual, it had had to get help from a fifteen year old boy who would be better employed in sawing wood than in concocting doggerel rhymes against the great American people.

Well, that suited *me* first-rate, because it advertised the poem; and the next thing I knew, every one in Belle Isle was reading it and talking to beat the band. And Kitty looked at me, so that I knew she had noticed that passage about girls. (Only she ought to have known I didn't mean *her*.) And the Deacon joked me about it and said: "Well, Dick, you're getting to be a pretty hard hitter, aren't you?" So I knew it didn't hit *him* very hard. I *thought* that poem would bite chunks out of the Deacon and all of our leading citizens; but it didn't; it only tickled them a little



KITTY LOOKED AT ME.

under the fifth rib, and cheered them up to do business worse than ever.

So that is all the good it does to tackle the great American people with poetry, or prose, or prayers, or sermons, or anything short of an earthquake; and as for smiles, you might as well smile at a hippopotamus or a bull of Bashan, or a crocodile with his mouth wide open and waiting to gobble you.

I'll bet if Cervantes had smiled from ear to ear at the chivalry of Belle Isle, it would have had about as much effect as water on a duck's back.

But Dad said it was a good lesson for me; and if any one expected to carry this happy old world by a *tour de force* or a *coup d'état*, or anything of that kind, after it had stood up under the gospel for two thousand years, he was a long way off his base, or words to that effect.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE JEWEM AND PINCHEM DEAL

ONE day Dad sent me down to Fenton's store after some nails and screws and glue and varnish to fix up the sacrifice chairs that Arthur Wiley had paid his subscription in; and when I got there, or maybe a while after, a discussion was going on between Henry Gilly of Cattle Hill on one side and everybody else on the other, as usual, about the big Jewem and Pinchem deal that was going to make all our fortunes.

Now you understand that the place where you got the most elevated and improving conversation in Belle Isle was in Fenton's store, where everything that went on was cussed and discussed from a high philosophical standpoint.

This was probably because Dr. Fenton never had anything to do himself, but sit and smoke and look wise and pitch in a question every little while that no one could answer; and then, he would sit and smoke and look as if he could answer it himself, if he wanted to; only it wasn't worth while. That was about all

that Dr. Fenton had to do: and Sid Grey, Bill's brother, did the rest.

Talk about your smart men! There wasn't a man in town that earned so much by doing so little as Dr. Fenton. He never got out of his chair from daylight till dark, except to go to his meals: and when a customer would come in, Fenton would take his pipe out of his mouth and nod over his shoulder and say, "Third drawer, Sid," or something of that kind: and that's what they call furnishing the brains, I suppose: and even that much wasn't necessary, because Sid knew where everything was, anyhow.

Well, I suppose it was because Dr. Fenton had nothing to do but furnish the brains that every one else with nothing to do would drop in and sit around and smoke and talk politics and business and religion and scandal, and wonder why the poor were so shiftless and good-for-nothing, and why labor was making so much trouble, and so on.

There were Dave Nickerson and old Mick McCarty and Henry Gilly of Cattle Hill, whenever he came to town, and Eli Teak once in a while, and Arthur Wiley when he could snatch a minute from snatching the hair off your head, and old Twitchell who got old Dishong sent up to Holton Jail, and anybody that had time to fool away on the kind of powwow they usually kept a-going in there.

Old Mick McCarty kept mum most of the time, which was the best plan for him; but when properly inspired with the fell destroyer, he could tell great yarns about his adventures down South during the war, and the number of hen coops and pig pens and whiskey jugs and colored women that he had put to flight. To hear old Mick tell it, you'd think there was nothing but colored women fighting on the other side. Bill Grey said it was very interesting the way old Mick had fought and bled for his country, and he ought to have a pension, sure.

But after all, you could never tell how much of it was true, because there were such a lot of monumental liars in that store, especially when they had their destroyer aboard.

As old Mick was in this condition when I came along, Dr. Fenton started in to see what he could get out of him.

"Michael," says he, with a slow wink at the crowd, "can't you give us one of your war stories, just to pass the time?"

And then you could see old Mick prodding around in his insides for something strong to tell to them; but just as he nearly had it, in came Henry Gilly from Cattle Hill, and changed the subject to religion; and I didn't care much, because every one knew beforehand what old Mick's war stories were going to be

like; and it just made you sick to think of a lot of men with families sitting around and listening to such fairy tales.

Now Henry's specialty was religion, because he was an atheist and didn't believe in it; and he said that that was why he was a man of unblemished character and honor and good behavior, and was never known to cheat any one; which was a fact, or else they would have said so, the minute his back was turned. And Henry said the reason he despised religion was because every one that ever had anything to do with it would steal the hair off the top of your head, if you took your eye off of him for ten seconds; and the more religion people had, the worse it made 'em. "This town," says Henry, "is just loaded up with religion; and look at 'em, will you! A slicker set of thieves and all-round scalawags couldn't be scared up on earth. They'd any of 'em skin their own grandmother and tan her hide for shoes; and then they talk about hell! The trouble with 'em is, that's where they are already!" says Henry.

This made old Twitchell mad, because he was extra good at a bargain, himself, to say nothing of sending people to hell for not believing the way they ought to, which was his way, of course; and there were no end of people just like him in Belle Isle.

But Henry Gilly had one weak spot where they

could get back at him, and that was rum, the fell destroyer. Not that Henry drank any more of it than any of them, nor a quarter part as much; only when he did, it flew to his head; and then he'd talk magnificently about his character and his honor and so on. And they told it on Henry that once when he was down at Bangor, he went into a hotel and called for the best room in the house; and the clerk told him to register; whereupon, Henry, who had just taken something for a cold, steps back and strikes an attitude and slaps his chest and says: "My character, my honor, and my good behavior have made and placed me where I am. Henry Gilly of Cattle Hill, by Jehovah!"

They told this on Henry every chance they got; but that was all they could tell; and Henry defied them to prove anything else against him. "And as for drinks," says he, "I'll take a drink any time I want to, by the great Jehovah!"

Henry was a little man about five feet high; but give him a thimbleful of bitters, and he could use the tallest language of any man in town, — not cuss words, you understand, but just tall, magnificent language, like Daniel Webster's or Daniel Pratt's; but it was mostly good, clean sort of language, because Henry hated anything low; and he could shut old Mick McCarty up by just looking at him once. So,

when Henry came in, old Mick shut up; and then Dr. Fenton opened up on Henry.

"Henry," says he, taking his pipe out of his mouth long enough to ask a question, "what would be the effect on Belle Isle, if we should abolish God?"

"Abolish him?" says Henry, getting excited, "abolish God! Why good God, man, you've done it already; only you're such continental fools that you don't know it!"

"Ah!" says Dr. Fenton, dry as dust. "So you contend that we're all of us atheists, hey?"

"Certainly!" says Henry, "that's just what I contend. There's two kinds of atheism," says he, "theoretical and practical. Theoretical, that's my kind; and practical, that's yours."

"Very good," says the Doctor; "only, Henry, suppose you just explain what you mean by this practical atheism?"

"Practical atheism," says Henry, "is believing in God and acting like the devil."

Then old Twitchell got up and went out mumbling that he wasn't going to sit and listen to no such blasphemy as that, though you noticed that he could listen to Mick McCarty as long as the next man.

"There!" says Henry, as if he had scored one that time; "there goes one of your true believers, and the meanest low-downest cuss in this town; and that's

saying a good deal. Mebbe he's gone out to send some one to hell or to jail, the way he did old Dishong."

"You'd call him a practical atheist, would you?" says Dr. Fenton.

"I would," says Henry, "and several other names in the bargain; because he believes there *is* a God, and it don't have any more effect on him than water on a duck's back. Now *I* don't believe there is any God; but if I did, I wouldn't go round trying to circumvent him all the time, and talking religion to throw dust in his eyes. Of course," says Henry, "if they'd practise *my* kind of atheism, that would be one thing; but defining it on their own terms as the quintessence of all cussedness, *I* say they are practising their own theory right along; and then they have the impudence and gall and all-round rottenness to pitch into a man that practises all that they preach, and without any God to help him either, by Jehovah!"

"Just my sentiments exactly!" says Dave Nickerson. "Say, Henry, let's go have a drink on that?"

"Drink be hanged!" says Henry. "I don't want no drink to help me out when I'm talking religion. All I want to set *me* a-going is just one look at men like Twitchell, or Jewem and Pinchem of Bangor."

Now you understand that Jewem and Pinchem of Bangor were looming up like little tin gods about this

time, because they were credited with the boom in business; and when Henry used that blasphemous language about them, you could see every one look around at each other as much as to say, "Well, don't this beat anything yet!" And Dr. Fenton tipped a wink around, as if it was all right to abolish God; but when it came to Jewem and Pinchem, it was time to draw the line.

"Well," says he, sarcastically, "what's the matter with Jewem and Pinchem?"

"*Matter* with 'em?" says Henry. "The matter is, they've got too much religion to suit me, and too much rag money floating around loose. They're going to boom the county, are they, and make us all rich in no time? I'll bet you a thousand dollars it'll turn out the biggest swindle that was ever perpetrated on the fools and blacklegs which this town is chiefly composed of," says he.

"How do ye know, Henry?" says Dave Nickerson, egging him on, as you could see.

"How do I know?" says Henry, getting excited. "How do I know that spiders'll ketch flies and foxes will appropriate geese? Don't we hear that Jewem and Pinchem are both of 'em church members in good and regular standing? Well, what more do you want? The next you'll hear is that them two pious examples have stole the hair off of your heads;

now you mark my words! *I* don't have nothing to do with 'em for one; and I don't take any of their rag money that they're flooding the country with — not a dollar bill!" says Henry; "and you bet your life, I watch the hair on top of my head till them two Sunday-school teachers are out of the country for good," says he.

Then the whole crowd burst into a big laugh, as if Henry was cracked, sure; and Dr. Fenton winked around at them and remarked in his dry, superior way, "Well, Henry," says he, "you understand religion all right; but ain't it just barely possible that some of us understand business pretty near as well as you do?"

"Mebbe you do, and mebbe you don't," says Henry, getting up to go. "Just wait and see, that's all I ask; and when the time comes, as it *will* come, just as sure as there is no God but the devil in this town, you can't say but I warned you. Them two saints are after your hair; and you'll feel for it and miss it before long, by the great Jehovah!"

"But what proof have you got, Henry?" says Dr. Fenton, dry and ironical as a corn-cob pipe.

"Proof?" says Henry. "Great polecats! Ain't they flooded the country with their rag money? Ain't they got you in their power, and ain't they church members in good and regular standing? What more

do you want? Mebbe you want me to prove that foxes'll ketch geese?" says he.

Then Henry left the store, and the others all looked around, as if Henry was cracked, which was what they pretended to think of him, only they all knew that there wasn't a one of them that could get the best of him in an argument or a bargain either; and that he could beat any farmer in the county at raising potatoes or apples or horses, or whatever he set out to raise; and had money in the bank that he had made honestly, or else you would have heard of it. "And I intend to show this town," says Henry, "that a man can be honest and successful without any of their religion; and raise better crops and git a better price for 'em than all the smart Eliks in Belle Isle."

Well, when I got home, I asked Dad what was all this talk about Jewem and Pinchem, and whether their money was good or not; because, if it wasn't, I had two of their dollars that I wanted to get rid of right away. And Dad said, "Fudge, fudge, you mustn't be so ready to listen to evil reports. Mr. Jewem and Mr. Pinchem are both good men, from all *I* can hear," says Dad, "and we can't afford to believe everything that is bruited abroad concerning business men of unblemished reputation," says he.

And then Dad said they were paying him his salary

in Jewem and Pinchem, and *he* never hesitated to receive it; and he didn't see why I should either, unless I was so much smarter than the majority of our leading business men.

Well, if Dad was as trustful and confiding as all that, it was no use to disturb him, so all I said was: "Maybe not, Dad. All the same, if I was you, I'd take greenbacks instead, whether I was a Greenbacker or not."

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad. "These Greenbackers are too smart by half. Besides, I guess you'll get rid of that two dollars quick enough."

Well, I guessed I would too. So I went down to Fenton's store and got rid of it for a pistol; and then swapped the pistol for a gun and sold the gun for two-fifty in greenbacks and laid them by for a rainy day. Of course, Jewem and Pinchem were all right, as Dad said; and of course, if that was so, it was all right to get rid of their money the same as you did of any kind. I believe in believing in your fellowmen, of course; but you don't have to believe the same thing about all of them.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW THE SKIES FELL

FOR a good while back the "Sunrise" had been bragging about our unexampled prosperity, for which we were indebted to the wonderful financial sagacity of Jewem and Pinchem; and it said that such astuteness as they exhibited was the flowering of the American genius, to say nothing of its being a black eye to the Greenback party, with its crazy clamor for more currency of the rag-baby kind, whereas, Jewem and Pinchem could and *would* redeem every one of their dollars in *greenbacks!*

Well, that was a pretty good one, I thought; but the "Sunrise" was always shedding that kind of light on the dark financial problems of this world.

And then the "Star" said that the "Sunrise" could have all the Jewem and Pinchem money it wanted; "but for our part," says the "Star," "we shall continue to prefer greenbacks when we can get them instead of cordwood and eggs and fair promises and other things that are brought to this office; and we are surprised that our venerable and conservative con-

temporary should so far forget itself as to advocate a wildcat currency based upon logs and high water, and deride by implication the dollar that financed the war of the Rebellion and withstood the shock of armed hosts and national cataclysm."

That made the "Sunrise" mad, of course; and the next issue warned the public against "that traitor in our midst, the 'Star,' which insidiously and industriously sows the seeds of financial distrust and commercial discord."

That was the kind of bouquets that half the papers in the county were throwing back and forth about this time; but it didn't seem to make any difference. The boom kept right on, just the same, and every one was sure he was going to get rich in no time; and Jewem and Pinchem kept dumping their paper mill on the county till there wasn't a greenback in sight, hardly; and prices rose on everything but preaching, and Mother said we must economize. But nobody minded that, because general prosperity was in our midst; and the "Sunrise" said it would extend itself to every one eventually, except those who by their natural lack of astuteness were bound to lose all of their chances anyhow; and I suppose that meant preachers, and so on. But Dad said it didn't, and that we rose or fell with the community in which we lived. So we prepared ourselves to rise along with the rest

of them; and I decided to get a jointed fish pole and a double-barrelled gun and several other necessities of life with my share of the plunder.

Oh, it was glorious to think of the skies dropping larks on us so that it would be nothing but larks all the time; and Dad's salary would be raised perhaps; and then again maybe it wouldn't; because that is generally the last thing that people think of doing with their prosperity, no matter what drops. But anyhow, I would strike Dr. Barker for a raise on doing his chores, and that would be something; and all the boys would have more or less money in their pockets and bargains would be brisk, and the astute would naturally not get the worst of it, as the "Sunrise" explained; and that was encouraging for *me;* and as for Bob Leighton and other such goonies, they must look out for themselves or take the consequences; because, as the "Sunrise" explained, "those of us to whom the God-given gift of astuteness was denied by Nature must not expect to partake of her bounty in the overflowing measure that was meted out to her favorite sons," which was another way of saying that the biggest hogs would hog it all, anyhow.

Well, if that was so, I decided to show them that I was one of the favorite sons.

The best part of it all was when the big drive went through the dam at Belle Isle, and the stream drivers

camped down below and entertained the whole town on beans that were baked in a bean hole, and biscuit that were baked before an open fire, and coffee that was boiled over the coals; and such things taste better than ambrosia and nectar.

And Kitty was there, and Irene and Mildred and Alice and a lot of other girls, all eating beans like the rest of us; and I said to Kitty, "I didn't know that girls ever ate anything;" and Kitty laughed and said, Oh, yes, they did, sometimes; and then she said, "I hear you've been learning to dance," as if there was something funny about it.

Well, that provoked me, somehow, and I got so bold all of a sudden that I came near saying, "Will you go with me to the next one?" Only just then a lot of those girls came giggling along as much as to say: "O my! If here ain't Kitty and Dick! Wonder what they're up to?" So I had to put that invitation off till the morrow, as usual, and sit down on a log with a biscuit in one hand and a cup of stream driver's tea sweetened with molasses in the other, and watch Kitty wander away with those fools of girls, while I sat and ate and thought what would have happened if I had really asked Kitty to go to that dance and she had said yes, and we had gone together and came home together and lingered by the door in the light of the dying moon together; and then, maybe,

taking her hand in mine, and so on, I would have said, "Kitty — " but oh, gammon! I hadn't asked her, and that was all there was to it. And that was me, every time, when Kitty was around!

Well, anyhow, there was one chance I didn't lose, and that was when the boys came in for their share of the beans, and so on; and I guess we were the only ones that earned what we ate, because we helped get wood for the fires, and so on.

And Jewem and Pinchem were there, shaking hands with everybody and looking so respectable and benevolent that I was ashamed of all the evil things I had been tempted to believe about them; and I saw that the "Sunrise" had got it right for once, and that here at last were two men who lived for just nothing but to do good and increase prosperity. And we fellows just stood around and feasted our eyes on them and ate beans and resolved to be like them, if we were spared.

And Dave Nickerson ate three big plates of beans and had drinks on the side with the drivers and any one that came along; and Dr. Barker and Editor Stackpole were there and treated each other so respectfully that every one was surprised and delighted; and there was a general era of good feeling, as the "Sunrise" said. "And even that doubting Thomas, the 'Star,'" says the "Sunrise," "was content for

once to partake of that general prosperity which it had essayed to defeat."

And that was the way they went on, all but Henry Gilly of Cattle Hill, who said that anybody who could be convinced by such arguments as beans would be convinced that spiders could be trusted with flies and foxes with geese; and that for his part, he should keep right on watching the hair on the top of his head.

"You'd think," says Henry, "that two such names as Jewem and Pinchem would be warning enough. But no," says he; "if two men by the name of Beelzebub and Boss Tweed should come to this town with money enough, you'd see every one fall on their necks and invite 'em to address the Sunday school."

And that was Henry's contribution to the era of good feeling.

Well, by and by things began to quiet down, and business wasn't quite so rushing, and leading citizens began to look glummer and glummer about something. That was the first cloud on the horizon, as you might say. And then, one day, Dad came in from down town and began talking out in the kitchen with Mother in a low tone, but loud enough so I could hear him from where I was in the dining room getting out a mean piece of Cæsar, who was cutting up as usual, robbing and murdering and enslaving like a regular

Belle Isler. — Or no! it was "Pious Æneas" by this time; but the difference between him and Cæsar was so slight that you could toss a copper between the two, and be equally well off whichever way it came down.

"Well," says Dad, "it's all up, and they've given me the straight tip," — or words to that effect.

"For the land's sake!" says Mother, half scared to death. "What's up now?"

"Jewem and Pinchem money isn't worth the paper it's printed on," says Dad; "and the leading men are quietly unloading on the farmers and teachers and preachers and Frenchmen and small fry generally. L. S. Blood dropped a friendly hint to me to get rid of mine right away; and then I sounded one or two others, and they said they guessed it was all right; but you can see what's up, just the same. They're all unloading as fast as they can; and you'll see when the smash comes that no one but the poor will suffer."

"Well, I never!" says Mother. "Is there any kind of mischief that this town won't get into?"

"Yes," says Dad, "but what am I going to do about it; that's the question? Am I going to stand by and see all the poor people swindled, and never say a word?"

Mother didn't answer for a minute, and you could

just hear her doing some tall thinking inside. "Oh well," says she, "I suppose we can move again. It's about time, anyhow."

"Humph!" says Dad, "so you think it'll come to that, if I open my mouth, do you?"

"Well," says Mother, "you know what parishes are? You know," says she, "how they always expect the church to play second fiddle to business and every mean thing there is going?"

"But I thought this one was going to be an exception," says Dad.

"Yes," says Mother. "We've been looking for that exception quite a while, but we never find anything but the rule."

"Humph!" says Dad, "we'll see."

"Yes," says Mother. "You'll see. Of course, you've got to do what you think is right; but I shall just quietly begin to pack up and get ready."

Then Dad heaved a big sigh, the way he usually did when he had an unpleasant duty to perform, which would probably lose him his job, and went off upstairs to his study; and the rest of the week he was hard at work pacing the floor upstairs, and eating nothing at meal times and muttering to himself, so that we knew that something was a-coming.

Saturday the "Star" came out announcing that Rev. Mr. Newman would preach next Sunday on

"The Jewem and Pinchem Swindle," and Sunday the hall was crowded.

Well, Dad told them plain and square that it was an open secret among the financial elect that Jewem



PACING THE FLOOR UPSTAIRS.

and Pinchem money wasn't worth a continental; and that being the case, the people had better be on their guard and resolve not to cheat or be cheated any more than what they had been already. Dad



said it was each man's duty to stand his loss, and not try to palm off bogus notes on the unwary. He said that he had some of the stuff himself, and he should just keep it and say nothing; and it was the duty of the rest of them to do the same, in his opinion. Anyhow, he was determined that nobody should get swindled any further through any silence on his part.

And then Dad waded into swindlers big and little, and gave his opinion of them at great length. "What name," says Dad, "shall we apply to the sly scalawaggery that plunders the poor, and abuses the confidence of simple people, and shifts off its blunders and crimes on the shoulders of those who can least afford to bear them? They may mask themselves under the cloak of religion, and take in vain the sacred names which rebuke their sins; but this cloak will not hide the wolfish and predatory lusts which deny them the name of Christian, Pagan, or Man.

"Yet what," says he, "is this Jewem and Pinchem crookedness but a shining example of the spirit and method which is lauded in public prints and private conversation as a model for our youth and the flower of American enterprise? If this is enterprise," says Dad, "then Satan is a model business man, and unblushing knavery and fraud are the ways of salvation!

"Or what," says he, "shall we say of the spirit that begets such men and brings them to birth and rears

them in our midst to wreak mischief and ruin on us all? How happens it," says he, firing up hotter and hotter, "that men of this stamp are so numerous in high places and low, so that turn where you will, you find them, from the petty pilferer who robs your orchard or hen roost, to the bold and brazen magnate who plunders a city, a state, or a nation, and is honored for doing it? 'The wicked walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted!'" says Dad, throwing away his manuscript and pouring out thunder and lightning. "And if we who are here," says he, "are now plundered in our turn, how far is it because we have aided and abetted the greedy and rapacious spirit which has robbed us? How far is it," says he, "because we have been taught, and have taught our children, the vulgar lesson of smartness?

"I shall not regret," says Dad, with grim satisfaction, "that two smart and greedy swindlers have swindled and robbed Belle Isle and the whole of this county — I shall not regret this lesson nor call it dear, if it teaches Belle Isle that the wages of this sin is death to all honor and manhood and peace and prosperity; and that no community can thrive, in even the lowest sense of the word, on principles that were born and cradled in hell."

That was the way he put her through! And it just made Tommy Dodge look sick, and Uncle Dan'l

Crump and L. S. Blood and Arthur Wiley, and old Twitchell and Gabe Whittaker, and a lot of other smart ones who were caught for once and had to sit and listen and sweat and stew while their little tin gods went clattering down.

And poor Mother sat there looking sad and resigned as if it had to be, of course; but she knew who would have to pay for it, just the same. But Bill and I just sat and hugged ourselves for joy; and after the sermon, we went up and behaved like men who could take their medicine, even if they *did* need it, and congratulated Dad on that effort, and told him that more of the same kind would fill a long-felt want in this country; and so did Miss Grey and Mrs. Dodge, and Mrs. Gerry and Mrs. Fenton and Mrs. Dr. Barker and Mrs. George Pearson and Mrs. Amsy Jenks and Mrs. Dan'l Crump and Mrs. L. S. Blood, and one or two of the men, including Eli Teak and Sid Grey and Sam Gerry and Dr. Barker and Amsy Jenks, of *course*. But the husbands of the women mostly looked sour and glum, as if business had got another black eye; and somehow, that is the way they generally look, if you say, "Thou shalt not steal," to church people.

And Henry Gilly was there for once, and went up and shook hands with Dad afterwards and said he had driven clear from Cattle Hill to hear that sermon,

and that it almost made him believe in God to hear the devil get such a lambasting as that.

Well, Dad was visibly surprised to find any one with him on one of the commandments; and as for Henry Gilly, Dad said afterwards that he wished he had a few more atheists like him in his church, because in that case, maybe God would stand something of a show, or words to that effect.

You would think, wouldn't you, that Uncle Dan'l Crump would be the foremost to congratulate Dad on that sermon of his, Uncle Dan'l being so prejudiced in favor of honesty? But instead of that, he just took his hat and slumped off out of the hall as sour as lemons; so the sermon must have trodden on his corns somewhere.

Well, we found where the shoe pinched next day, when Mattie Crump rushed into our house and hollered out: "Wasn't Father lucky, though? He had fifty dollars in Jewem and Pinchem money on hand just before the failure; and an old farmer came in with a brand-new fifty dollar greenback that he wanted changed; and Gabe Whittaker asked him if he just as lieves have Jewem and Pinchem money as not, and the farmer said he supposed it was just as good; so Father got rid of it just in time; and *my*, wasn't he lucky?" And away she went to spread the news.

Mother said the poor young one didn't seem to

exhibit the rudiments of moral sense. Well, as for me, I never was especially struck on Mattie Crump, owing chiefly to her gift of gab; but when it came to loading her up with all the cussedness there was in town, it was time to draw the line; so I said, "Well, how's she going to get any moral sense, when there's no such thing in Belle Isle?"



MATTIE CRUMP.

"Fudge, fudge," says Dad. "Look at Amsy Jenks and Henry Gilly and — and — "

"Yes, Dad, I've been looking at 'em for some time," says I, "and I notice they look as lonesome and solitary as ever; and as for the rest of 'em, you've been talking moral sense to 'em for the last four years, and the result is, they go deliberately to work, like Uncle Dan'l Crump, to skin an old farmer out of his last dollar!"

"Oh, well, maybe Uncle Dan'l didn't know what he was up to," says Dad, feebly.

"Didn't he!" says I, with scorn. "You said yourself, Dad, that the financial elect were all on to it; and I have it straight from Tommy Dodge that Uncle Dan'l was on to it the quickest of any of 'em! No wonder he didn't congratulate Dad on that sermon of his! — coming into church there with his pockets bulging with the mammon of unrighteousness!"

And then Mother said she was *sick*, sick to death of it all; and she never wanted to hear the word *honesty* again till it meant something besides what it meant in Belle Isle. But even then, Dad wouldn't give in beat and own up that such honesty as we had in town was totally unworthy of the name. He said it was just a temporary aberration; and that Belle Isle would presently recover her moral tone, and rise like a phœnix from her ashes, and resume her virtuous career.

Well, that was a little too much for *me*, and I said, "How's a town going to *resume* what it's never *begun?*" says I. And *that* time I escaped before Dad could recover his senses. It was a sockdolager, anyhow.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE LARKS WE CAUGHT

WELL, it beats all how people degenerate as they go on in this life!

There was Tad, for instance! When he was about four years old, we were playing Hark from the Tombs, one day, and I crawled under the table and lay down, and said: "I'm dead, Tad, I'm dead;" and poor little Tad cried because I was dead; and I had to stick my head out and tell him I was just fooling. But that was when Tad was four years old, mind you. Well, time passed on, and by the time Tad was eight years old, I was taken sick from eating a watermelon, and Tad said to Mother: "Mother," says he, "if Dick dies, can I have his boots?"

Now if that don't prove that the longer we live, the worse we get, what does it prove?

Then, again, look at me, for instance! When we first came to Belle Isle, I was so honest and confiding that I intrusted Dad with two dollars, which I had come by honestly, and told him to keep it for me. And sure enough, Dad kept it till it got to be a regular

fairy tale in the family; and Dad said I had wheedled it out of him forty times over; and that it was worse than the Widow Cruse's oil jug; but of course that was no such thing. All the same, it shows how honest and confiding I was when I first came to Belle Isle; but by the time I left it, I wouldn't have trusted the Angel Gabriel with a counterfeit nickel; and if that don't show what the world is coming to, what does it show?



All over Town.

Anyhow, you could see easy enough what Belle Isle was coming to before long; and as Dad said we rose or fell with the community in which we lived, our family began to prepare itself for the toboggan slide.

To begin with, that sermon of Dad's was all over town before night, along with the Jewem and Pinchem failure; but nobody seemed to be very grateful to Dad for the warning he gave them, because, they mostly figured it out that if Dad had only kept mum a while longer, they could have worked off their Jewem and

Pinchem on some one else. But as most of the leading citizens had done this already, the sermon didn't hurt them any, they said; though you could see it did, just the same, by getting in under their skins.

But they had their revenge on us in advance; and this was how they took it. All the ministers in town, including Dad, had been paid off in Jewem and Pinchem, just before the failure; and in Dad's case it was especially aggravating, because good money had just been sent in by the State missionary society to help pay his salary, which the church people had quietly swiped and handed him over Jewem and Pinchem instead.

We *thought* they were paying up uncommonly prompt, and now we saw the reason why. They *had* to get rid of that Jewem and Pinchem in a hurry, or not at all. Of course they said they were very sorry about it afterwards; but we noticed they weren't sorry enough to ante up our good money that they had in their pockets, and take back the stuff that they had palmed off onto Dad. Mother said it was a regular swindle, and that Dad ought to protest; but he said it would be no use, because they would say it was an ordinary business transaction; and we had got to suffer along with the rest.

And then Mother cried, and said she *did* think it was a shame that ministers had to endure such things

from their own parishioners, and what was the use of preaching, anyhow? And Dad looked fearfully discouraged and went off up to his study and stayed there for two days, pacing the floor and muttering things to himself. And sometimes he'd laugh, as if it was awfully funny; and then again, he'd give a kind of a groan, as if he was having a hard time inside.

I used to wonder why Dad carried on in that style; because all he had to do was to sit up there and write sermons, and preach 'em once a week and draw his salary; which was the only hard thing he had to do. But now I began to see that if I were a minister, I would pace the floor like a caged tiger, and mutter things that would raise your hair; and I muttered some, as it was, over that Jewem and Pinchem deal.

Well, we had to keep still, of course, being the minister's family; but others who had had the stuff unloaded on them were pretty mad, and said so; and the farmer who had had his fifty-dollar greenback changed for Jewem and Pinchem at Uncle Dan'l Crump's, drove up to the store and wadded the stuff up in a ball and threw it in Uncle Dan'l's face, and, "That's for your damned honesty!" says he, "you snivellin', whinin', groanin' old humbug; and not a d—d bit of trade will you ever git out o' me or any one in our neighborhood. You thought you was pretty

d—d smart, didn't you, palmin' off that bogus money on me; but you'll find it'll cost you hundreds of dollars before you git through with this business!" And then, shaking his fist in Uncle Dan'l's face and cussing and recussing him for a dirty, hypocritical old skunk, he drove off.



CUSSING AND RECUSSING HIM.

And Uncle Dan'l whined and took on about it; and said he never saw such ingratitude in his life, to abuse an honest man the way they did him, when they all knew he was as honest as any one *could* be. It grieved Uncle Dan'l so that he pretty nearly had a fit of sickness over it; but he hung on to the money just the same.

The other leading men weren't making any complaint, but just sat around in their stores with iron mugs on them, and eyes like slits in one of those old castles that the robber barons used to live in. It was the worst exhibition that was ever seen in Belle Isle, and made you feel like Charlie Taggart and his "Oh, heavens — ah, — if I could but shut out that

sight — ah!" But worse still was the way they talked of it in Fenton's store, and on the corner, and all over town.

"Wouldn't you 'a' done the same thing if you could, come now?" says Arthur Wiley to Eli Teak, speaking of Jewem and Pinchem, and how smart they were to take us all in, except Arthur and the long-headed ones. "If you saw a chance to crawl out of it, and save your bacon the way they did, wouldn't you jump at it and let the public be damned?" says Arthur; and then settled back and went to smoking his pipe fiercely with a face on him like iron and eyes like arrow slits; and that's the kind of man that his mother names after King Arthur of the Round Table, in hopes it will strike in! And nobody answered Arthur, and you could see that those were their principles.

"Well," says Eli, at last, "I don't know what I'd do myself till the time come. When you are brought up to be a scamp, the way we all of us are in this town, and the bigger scamp you are, the more you are looked up to, it ain't safe to predict what you would do at a pinch; but I *believe* I'd do just as Elder Newman said, and give up my last dollar before I'd unload my blunders and deviltries on the shoulders of innocent people."

"Elder Newman be damned!" says Arthur. "That kind of rot is all right for Sunday schools, but when it

comes right down to business, you know and I know that nobody is going to pay any attention to any such damned nonsense. Jewem and Pinchem have done just what any of us would have done in their circumstances; so what's the use of talking?"

"That's the talk!" says Dave Nickerson, fixing his game eye on heaven. "Give the devil his due, *I* say. Blanked if it ain't quite an honor to be took in by two such champion crooks as that! They left us our old breeches, anyhow, so what more do we want? Blank me, if I don't admire 'em!" says Dave. "Here we been plumin' ourselves on how blank smart we were; and now we found out that we got a hell of a lot to learn," says he.



CHAPTER XXXII

HENRY GILLY'S BLASPHEMY

WELL, that galled them some; and the next minute in came Henry Gilly of Cattle Hill, and began rubbing it into them so hard that Dr. Fenton made the air blue with tobacco smoke to keep himself cool, and calm, and dry as usual; and Arthur Wiley nearly bit his pipe in two, and Gabe Whittaker said afterwards that God ought to have struck Henry dead for such blasphemy. And all they could do was to sit and suffer, while Henry rubbed it into them till their skins were raw, and showed them what a green and helpless set of nincompoops they were, and what small fry they were in the shark pond.

"Aha!" says Henry, with a pleased look on his face, as if he had been after them for some time, and had got them at last. "Here they be!" says he, — "the astute business men of Belle Isle! Well, I'm glad to see 'em and congratulate 'em on their wonderful astuteness and successful prognostications! Wonderful set of men! wonderful!" says he. "So cute and smart and sharp and astute that sharks would turn

pale at the sight of 'em; and all of 'em church members, too, in good and regular standing! Nothing like religion, gentlemen," says Henry, "for a foundation to do business on!"

This made Gabe Whittaker squirm some, and Dr. Fenton tightened his grip on his pipe and said, as dry as dust, "I suppose you mean, Henry, it's turned out just as you said, and you've come around to crow over us?"

"Oh, no," says Henry, "I'm nothing but a plain ordinary farmer myself, with no particular astuteness to brag of, and no religion to cover it up with; but when you ketch me getting a couple of foxes to take care of my geese for me, — especially foxes that have got religion, — you can work your Uncle Henry for a sucker. I must say I'm surprised," says Henry, "to find all my idols tumbled to ruin like this! Here I am nothing but a simple-minded farmer that naturally looks up to astuteness, and comes in here to Belle Isle once a week for a pound of nails, and a little light and leading, — and now, what do I see?" says he, sweeping one hand around the circle. "The greenest set of nincompoops that ever broke loose from their mothers! — fooled and swindled and worked for suckers, every one of 'em, by a gold brick game that couldn't be worked on a new-born calf! Foxes that had got religion wouldn't touch geese, they said; — oh, no! And the

geese would save their necks — oh, yes! — even if they *did* stick them right into the foxes' mouths! *That's* their philosophy, and that's their business astuteness, and that's their true religion that makes them so nice and honest and pure and pious!"

Then Gabe Whittaker said something that he wished he hadn't, because it gave Henry just the chance he was waiting for. "Well, who are you, anyhow?" sneers Gabe. "Maybe you call yourself a connisoor on religion!"

"Oh, no," says Henry, looking pleased at his chance; "I don't pretend to be as smart and astute as if I'd got religion. I'm nothing but an atheist and an infidel; and so I ain't unloaded any bogus money on ministers, and pocketed their salary myself. I leave all that to them that are up near the throne. But," says Henry, "in my humble opinion, any man that would unload Jewem and Pinchem money on a minister would desecrate his grandmother's grave."

Then Dr. Fenton's eyes shut nearly up behind his tobacco smoke, and he drawled out, dry as a pile of old shingles, "Well, Henry," says he, "what else can you expect on your theory that there is no God?"

"No God?" says Henry, wheeling round on the Doctor, and getting red in the face. "And how many's going on that theory in this town? Just one that I know of; and he's about the *only* one that ain't



HENRY GILLY.

a low-down common thief; and that's what *your* theory amounts to! It ain't merely that I don't believe there is any God, but even if there was one, I'd *hate* him! And why?" says Henry. "For letting the devil run loose on earth, till there ain't nothin' but hell above ground, and mean, ugly devils that call themselves men, and ain't none, any more than a hog is an archangel! That's why I don't believe in no God that never does nothin' but set still and see hell raised from one year's end to the other, and swallow down praises from church people; and if I was to see him on his lazy, good-for-nothing throne, I'd shake my fist in his face and say: off of the throne with ye, for a fraud and a nincompoop that ain't worth his salt!"

And then Henry shook his fist at heaven, and we all of us waited to see the lightning strike him dead; but it didn't; and Henry went out and drove about seventeen good bargains, and then drove home and prospered generally from that time on, leaving that crowd sitting there and looking as if they had had the floor wiped up with them, and been flung in the corner like so many old mop rags.

So I guess what Henry said didn't bother God much, because maybe he had his hands too full with the church people. And if I was in his place, I would attend to their case first; because it would aggravate me more to see a lot of people believing in me, and



acting like the Old Nick, as Henry put it, than it would to see some one *not* believing in me and acting about half decent; and even if he sassed me, I would say, "That's all right, Henry, as long as you behave yourself and set an example to those other fools."

That is the way I look at it; and I don't believe that God is a bigger fool than I am, as Gabe Whittaker does.

Which reminds me of the Deacon's explanation of the Jewem and Pinchem failure. He said, the Deacon did, that it was the hand of God, and we must all of us bow to the will of the Almighty. Which meant that we must take twenty-five cents on a dollar and let him and Jim Cheatham and Jewem and Pinchem have the rest. The "Sunrise" delivered a long sermon on this view of the case, and expounded the ways of Providence in a two-column editorial; but very few could seem to see it in that light, and the result was that the circulation of the "Sunrise" fell off.

Anyhow, the facts in the case were about like this.

As Goodrich and Cheatham had gone into the same big lumber deal with Jewem and Pinchem, of course they all failed together; and I was just beginning to be sorry for Kitty and Hal, when we heard that it had all been settled up for twenty-five cents on a dollar.

Maybe this was Jim Cheatham's idea, and maybe it wasn't; but anyhow, it was such a good one that he

and the Deacon came up smiling as usual, and not much worse for wear.

So, as Dad said, the smart ones all crawled out of it somehow, and it was only the poor that suffered.

All the farmers and Frenchmen and scrub women and ministers and teachers and small fry generally were loaded up with the stuff, in return for the work they had done growing potatoes and scrubbing floors and sawing wood and preaching the brotherhood of man, and teaching the young idea how to recite, "My country, 'tis of thee," and so on. But of course that was all right, because, as the "Sunrise" said, we had proved ourselves deficient in astuteness, or else we wouldn't have been the receptacle for the Jewem and Pinchem.



THE POOR THAT SUFFERED.

Some said that what caused the Jewem and Pinchem failure, was the seventeen barrels of spoiled chickens that Jim Cheatham had fed to the men up in the

lumber camp, thus making them so dyspeptic and anarchistic that they got sulky and ugly and did as little as they could, and got 'way behind with the work, and held back the logs till high water was almost gone, and the big drive got hung up for two hundred miles along the river; so that Jim Cheatham had saved forty dollars' worth of carrion, and lost a million dollars' worth of lumber; and that was the kind of smart Elik *he* was!

But Jim said, "Stuff! Those chickens were a treat for 'em!" And the Deacon said it was the hand of God. But my idea was that it was the hand of Jewem and Pinchem, who had financed the deal with old rags, so that it was a heads-I-win-tails-you-lose proposition, to say nothing of Goodrich and Cheatham, who also had a hand in it; and they needn't think because they had buncoed the whole county, that they could lay it off on God, because it stands to reason that he wasn't in partnership with *them.*

I asked Dad how he explained it that Henry Gilly, who was an atheist, was about the only man in town with any righteous indignation gnawing at his vitals? And Dad said, sure enough! He never happened to meet an atheist that didn't prove to be a very religious man; and he wondered why it was; and he said that it looked to him as if some of God's orphans had more of his stuff in them than some that were doing nothing

but howl to him for sugar-plums, or words to that effect.

"That's all right, Dad," says I, "but if we've got anything much in this town but God's orphans, I beg to be informed; because, as Henry says, practical atheism is believing in God and acting like the devil; and applying that test, *I* say —"

"Fudge, fudge," says Dad, and left suddenly for his study; but I had the right idea, just the same, because I could see it sticking in Dad's crop.

And all the other orphans were down on Henry as never before, on account of their devotion to religion, they said, though you could see it was nothing but devotion to their skins. And Henry's defiance of God grew into a fairy tale in Belle Isle; and then grew and grew till it grew to be a first-class, simon-pure lie, such as people are in the habit of believing in; and Dave Nickerson said, if it kept on, they would end up by believing that Henry was the devil himself, instead of about the only decent man in town; but that wouldn't surprise him any, Dave said, because if Old Nick was to come to this town, they would take him for God.

Well, Old Nick concluded not to try it, for fear of losing his pitchfork; but about this time, a wandering Jew came along with jewellery that would turn green on you the day after you bought it, and which he was planning to work off on the innocent natives at a

sacrifice. So we let him go ahead, and gave him Jewem and Pinchem for it at fifty cents on a dollar; and before the Jew was out of town, Jewem and Pinchem fell to twenty-five cents on a dollar, and kept on falling from morn till dewy eve, as the poet says.

This was probably the same Jew that we read about afterwards in a Boston paper, who came home busted; and his partner said, "Mein Gott, Isaac, vat you do mit your goots, huh?" and Isaac said, "Dose Yankees vas too shmart for me."

CHAPTER XXXIII

ELDER PRITCHARD'S PRAYER

SO that was all the good that Dad's sermons did to the Belle Islers. You could preach yourself black in the face in that town, and you might as well recite Shakespeare to a flock of geese.

Well, one reason why I hadn't as much confidence in sermons, as I ought to have, was because I had seen churches before, and they all behave about the same way. They always act their prettiest when you first get there; and from that time on they get worse and worse, till an orang-outang would want to leave town. So that is the way that sermons seem to sit on *them*.

The last church we were in, before we came to Belle Isle, there was a man next door to us who kept a dog to bite people's legs when they went by; and he was the leading man in our church; and before long, sure enough, he and the dog and the whole family were biting *our* legs; and the church people just sat and looked on. And then *they* began to lick *their* chops at us, and Dad said it was time to go.

You can do anything you like to a minister, and nobody will object. If a crocodile was to start in to eat up a minister's family, most of the church people would side with the crocodile. Dad says there *are* churches that never do this; and I told him if that was so, I would pay something to see one.

For these reasons, I decided the day I was born never to go into the ministry; and so did all of us, including Mother herself; but she broke her vow with the first minister that came along, and the result was four innocent children who had to endure the lifelong consequences. If I had to choose between the ministry and a den of lions, I would take my chances with the lions; and that was where the prophet Daniel showed his good sense.

Well, when people decide that they have got to economize, they always begin on the church, because that is something they can do without, and not miss it much. So a lot of people began on our church right away, and on Elder Pritchard's, and all the churches in town; and then they said that the finances weren't keeping up, and the ministers weren't holding their congregations, and so on.

The Belle Islers never had been anything to brag about on going to church; and now the way they began to remember the Sabbath day at home was a caution!

You will see people in this world licking their children for hooking jack from school; and then you will see the same people hooking jack from church right along, year in and year out; and there's no one to lick them for it, either — oh, no! And then, you'll see these hook-jack people wondering why the church isn't flourishing the way it ought to, and why it isn't cram-jam full when they happen to drop in once in six months. Well, the reason is that nine-tenths of this world is composed of people who lie abed till noon on Sunday, recovering from business astuteness. But that is only on *Sunday*, mind you! And the next morning, you will see them hop out of bed at four-thirty A.M. sharp, so as to be on hand bright and early, and skin somebody before breakfast.

And yet ministers are expected to bring in the Kingdom of God with that kind of material, and a salary that would make a hod-carrier go on a strike, and that is three months behind in the bargain!

Along about this time, Elder Pritchard got into hot water by preaching on "Thou shalt not steal," which was applied by Gabe Whittaker, and one or two other leading parishioners to the Jewem and Pinchem they had worked off on the Elder instead of his salary; whereupon these specimens all rose as one man and said they were tired of hearing the Elder preach morality instead of Jesus Christ. So *he* had to go (the

Elder, I mean), with nothing much but Jewem and Pinchem in his pocket.

Bill and I denounced it up hill and down as a shame and a disgrace and an outrage and an all-round, low-down specimen of unmitigated cussedness that would make a cur dog sick at his stomach; and what was more, we said it to Gabe Whittaker's face, mind you, so as to give him a chance to put the coat on if it fitted; and I guess it did, because Gabe threatened to kick us out of the store; and we just stood there and told him to go ahead and we'd see who could do the most kicking; and Gabe simply stood and swore pretty well for a church member; and Uncle Dan'l Crump nearly burst into tears, and said it had come to a pretty pass when an honest man like him had to have swearing and fighting going on in his store; and Bill and I retired on our laurels.

Well, that was Saturday night; and the next Sunday evening, we dropped in to hear old Elder Pritchard, the last time he ever preached in Belle Isle; and the Elder made a prayer that ought to have made them sick of their meanness, only it didn't, nor anything like it.

"How long, O Lord," says Elder Pritchard, when he was warmed up and got to going, "how long wilt thou forsake this most unhappy people, which has given

itself over to Beelzebub? Return, O Lord, how long, and let it repent thee concerning these most miserable servants, who have become as the servants of Satan! Return, O Lord, and teach them that this is hell, even this house of thine, so long as thy spirit is absent, and that they are damned already, because they have not hallowed thy name. Yea, though they honor thee with their lips, yet their heart is far from thee, and iniquity and guile and craft and extortion are their daily offering unto Satan; and no man loveth his neighbor as himself, nor remembereth thy commandments to do them; and the blood of the poor crieth unto thee from the ground, and the widow and the orphan whom they have devoured. Thou hast set watchmen on thy towers, which have not held their peace, day and night; yet is their warning vain, and their voice is as a voice crying in the wilderness. For this people's heart is waxed gross; they have turned every one to his own way, and thou hast laid on thy faithful ones the iniquity of them all. Yet, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Oh, satisfy them early with thy mercy, thou who art our light and our salvation! Create in them a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within them. Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him."

That was the gist of Elder Pritchard's prayer, as nearly as Bill and I could remember it.

Bill said it was a sockdolager, and no mistake; and that he hadn't heard anything since Dad's last sermon that gave him such a realizing sense of the cussedness of Belle Isle; and he wished they had all been there to hear it; because maybe it would have stirred up their livers a little. But we wrote it down as well as we could between us, and got it published in the "Star"; and Dr. Barker wrote an editorial on it, rubbing it in; and it made a lot of people hopping mad, especially such people as Gabe Whittaker, and other pious frauds who needed it the worst. And then the "Sunrise," seeing its chance to get them on its subscription list, came out with a stern rebuke to ministers for overstepping the bounds of expediency and using the pulpit to set religion and business at loggerheads, and thus alienating the solid element that the church had got to rely on for financial backing, or words to that effect; and you could rely on the "Sunrise," every time, for that kind of preachment.

But Dad read Elder Pritchard's prayer in the "Star," and said amen to the Elder on it, the first time they met on the street; but Elder Pritchard shook his head, and said, "Had my prayers been acceptable to the Almighty, he would have opened the ears of this people, and confounded Satan in our midst. I have

threatened them with the flames of hell and tempted them with the hope of heaven, but in vain. You, too, my brother," says Elder Pritchard, wringing Dad by the hand, "have labored in the same stony vineyard. You have cried aloud and spared not. You have spoken with tongues that were strange to me, and yet, with no uncertain sound. You have blown the trumpet of Joshua before the walls of this Jericho, and yet they have not fallen! The Lord's will be done! Had he chosen us as the instruments of his wrath, no Jericho could have stood before us. We are perhaps but John the Baptists, baptizing them unto repentance; but doubtless a greater shall come who shall baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

That was Elder Pritchard's style; and for once it didn't sound so very bad if it *was* so old-fashioned. And then the old man sort of threw out his hands in despair, and said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!"

And then, with a sort of groan, the old man went on; and Dad said it was the most affecting sight he ever saw in his life.

Well, a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, as the poet says; and maybe Dad and Elder Pritchard were both more inclined to bury the hatchet of the-



ology, seeing that both of them were about equally loaded up with kicks and objurgations and Jewem and Pinchem by their beloved brethren.

So Elder Pritchard went to another vineyard as stony as Belle Isle, most likely, or stonier; and then our turn came.

CHAPTER XXXIV

DAD'S MISTAKE

I WENT down to Uncle Dan'l Crump's one day, to see Tommy Dodge about a deal, and a lot of men were in there behind a pile of dry-goods boxes talking Dad over and showing up the mistakes he had made by fooling with the ten commandments; and Gabe Whittaker said, oh, yes, the Elder was all right enough from a moral point of view, but that kind of doctrine couldn't last long in this town, because it meddled too much with business.

"Makes you sweat worse than hell fire, hey, Gabe?" says Eli Teak.

Well, it wasn't popular, anyhow, Gabe said. What this town needed was the kind of doctrine that discoursed about *spiritual* things and let business alone, the way Elder Pritchard did before he got to preaching morality; and that was what killed *him*, Gabe said: preaching mere morality and neglecting the *spiritual*.

My, but you ought to hear Gabe pronounce that word *spiritual!* You'd think he was so thick with the angels that ministers couldn't teach *him* anything; which was just it, precisely.

And Gabe said, if ministers would only stick to *spiritual* things, like fire and brimstone, and so on, we would all of us do what was right, and everything would be lovely.

"Well, if that's the case," says Eli, "our wings ought to be sprouting by this time; because," says he, "this town was born in fire and cradled in brimstone; and yet, look at us, will you? We read in the good book," says Eli, "how the Lord rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them; but Belle Isle has stood fire and brimstone for forty years, and never felt better in her life!"

"Well," says Gabe Whittaker, "we ain't heard much about it lately, anyhow. Nothing but a lot of cheap talk about the Golden Rule and the Brotherhood of Man, and so on! What's that amount to?" says Gabe. "And then again," says he, "what business has a minister got to run down the men that's supportin' him, and git up every Sunday with a sermon tellin' us we got no business to do business the way we do? What's *he* know about business?" says Gabe.

"That's the talk!" says Dave Nickerson. "Any preacher that ain't willin' to knuckle down to this Main Street crowd, had better git out. Damn the Bible, *I* say, when it gits in the way of business!"

Well, that didn't seem to suit Gabe, either; and he inquired sarcastically whether Dave proposed to reform

religion or not. "If so," says he, "maybe you'll begin by abolishing hell? *I* would if I was in your place." And then he laughed to himself to think how he would



"WHAT'S *HE* KNOW ABOUT BUSINESS?"

enjoy it when he sat up in his reserved seat and saw Dave bubbling around in the boiling oil.

"Oh, undoubtedly, Gabe," says Eli, "you need a hell to keep you straight. In fact," says he, "one hell is hardly enough for some people, and I'd recommend a dozen or so; and even then, I wouldn't want to go on their bond," says he.

That made Gabe so mad he had to go wait on a customer before he could get his wind; and then Dave Nickerson chuckled and cocked his game eye up at the seraphs and said:—

"Yes, that's about it," says Dave, taking a good bite

out of a plug of tobacco. "The preachin' ain't nothin' now'days to what it was when I got religion. I can remember when the old church used to just smell of brimstone; and, when it got so thick you couldn't breathe, they'd sort of open the windows, and let in some fresh air and tell you you was saved. And talk about language! Why, every other word was a cuss word; and that was where I learned some of my best swearin'. Used to scare us nearly into fits in them days; but they got so now they don't scare worth a continental in this town, — that is," says Dave, "unless you begin to preach honesty to 'em; and then they'll run like thieves when they see a policeman comin'."

"Maybe you're one of Elder Newman's converts?" sneers Gabe Whittaker, over a parcel of bad butter.

"Me?" says Dave, easy as you please; "I'm nobody's convert but the Old Boy's; I don't never set foot inside of a church, because I ain't no hankerin' to set up there and face the ten commandments; and I s'pose that's what ails the rest of 'em, — specially when they just been showin' themselves up for a set of blankety-blank rascals. And that's all the good preachin' does in this town," says Dave. "If I was overtook by a call to preach," says he, "I'd go holler down a rain-barrel at the bugs and agree to do just as much good as any minister in this town, and that's why my sympathies are with 'em," says Dave.

"You'd better keep your sympathies for yourself; you'll need 'em some day," says Gabe Whittaker, as if he saw a red-hot oven waiting for Dave in the sweet by-and-by; and then Dave smiled cheerfully and shifted his quid and said, —

"Well," says he, "of course, I don't never expect to see God and the angels; but when I stand up before Old Satan to give an account of my stewardship, I expect he'll make it warm for me for not doing as much work for him as church members. He'll say to me, Old Nick will, 'Dave, you dashety dashed continental idiot, what the hades does a little drinkin' and swearin' amount to when you might 'a' been stealin' the hair off people's heads and subscribin' to churches out of the proceeds, and kickin' ministers out for preachin' the ten commandments? Git along back there and do it all over again!' he'll say, 'and don't show your blankety face in these diggin's again without a church member's ticket.'"

Well, when Gabe Whittaker heard that, he turned green with his religion, and looked as if he'd like to be one of the demons that would have the job of prodding Dave up with the red-hot pitchforks. And it *was* an awful roast on Gabe and the kind of church member he was. And then Dave took another squint at the angels, and said he guessed he'd have to go and git a little ginger-pop, after talkin' so much religion. And when he was gone, Uncle Dan'l Crump said: —

"That Dave Nickerson's a bad man. He smokes and drinks and chews and swears; and he don't know honesty when he sees it right under his nose. I've been about the only honest man in this town for nigh on to twenty years; and now I got to have a man like that come into my store and call me a d—d rascal; and that's all the good it does to be honest," says Uncle Dan'l.

But Dave hadn't said anything about Uncle Dan'l; so I didn't see what call *he* had to feel so bad, unless the coat fitted him pretty well. But maybe he was thinking of that Jewem and Pinchem money he had unloaded on that green countryman. Anyhow, that's what *I* was thinking of.

Then I came round from behind the boxes, and the men all shut up like clams, and looked at each other sideways; and I made up my mind that our time was pretty near up.

Well, I wasn't much surprised after that when Dad came home one night looking all played out, and said he guessed he had done all the good he could in this town, and it was about time for us to be packing up. The congregations were getting so thin, he said, and it was so hard to collect subscriptions, and every one was feeling so poor and needy that he guessed he was more of a burden than a help to them; and so, he was going to hand in his resignation.

"Well," says Mother, "what did I tell you? But we've kept on longer than I expected after that sermon of yours on the Jewem and Pinchem failure."

"Oh, no, that hadn't anything to do with it," says Dad.

"Oh, no, of course not!" says Mother.

"Well," says Dad, with a big sigh, "maybe I've been too hard on them. Maybe I ought to have been easier on them and tried to comfort 'em up, and so on." And then he went on to think up about five hundred ways in which he could have done things better and led them gradually along without their knowing what he was up to, till he got them where they could stand the ten commandments, and so on. I stood it as long as I could, till at last I got so disgusted that I pitched in and relieved my mind.

"Yes, Dad," says I, "the trouble was, you started in too far ahead with 'em. The way you ought to have done was to have started in along back in the glacial period, and maybe by this time you could have had them as far along as the mastodons; and after that you could have worked 'em up to the chimpanzees, and then to the cannibals, and so on."

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad.

"Well, then, what's the use of going on in that style?" says I. "It just makes me sick to hear this talk about comforting people, when what they need is more par-

ticular fits. What do they want to be comforted for?" says I.

"Why, why," says Dad, "there are the natural trials and sufferings of this life, and —"

"Humbug!" says I. "There's Arthur Wiley, now! *He* suffers because he can't work off *all* his rotten buggies and chairs on the greenhorns. And old John Skinner suffers because he can't skin everybody, quite; and the rest of us suffer for lack of the hair which they have reaped from the top of our heads; and that's the kind of sufferers we've got in this town; but I don't see how you're going to comfort 'em any, unless you let them skin you alive; and they've pretty near done that already. Or else," says I, "you could propose to make soap grease of Arthur and old John, and so on; and that's the kind of platform *I'd* stand on."

"Fudge, fudge!" says Dad; but he brightened up just the same. "So you don't think I was too hard on them, Dick?" says he.

"Not by a long shot!" says I. "You've been giving 'em just what they need, and they know it; and that's precisely what ails 'em; and if I'd been in your boots, Dad, they wouldn't have got off so easy; only, I wouldn't waste any of my time on such an outfit," says I. "You might as well stand in the Atlantic Ocean up to your neck and sing hymns to a school of sharks."

"Well, well," says Dad, "I guess it's high time we were getting out of Belle Isle, before Dick loses all his faith in human nature. And after all," says Dad, "there are lots of good people in Belle Isle; and, on the whole, I don't know of any place where we ever fared as well as here."

"Yes, Dad," says I. "We ought to be thankful for getting off so cheap. We haven't got any crazy man after us, thirsting for our blood, the way we had in the last place; nor any big fat frump of a woman like that one that worried the life out of Mother, and —"

"Sh! sh!" says Dad. "Yes, that's so, Dick. Personally, your mother and I and all of us have been treated first-rate here; and as for the sermons, maybe they'll think better of them after I'm gone; and I don't know but possibly in certain quarters I may have done a little good already," says Dad, cheering himself up, as you could see.

"Pooh!" says Irene. "I'm not worrying about these people. They'll get on all right, never you fear. What I'm worrying about is this family."

"Oh, I've arranged all that," says Dad. "We'll go back to Boston, and I'll get something to do and put you children in school to prepare for college. And when Dick gets *there*," says Dad, "perhaps they can teach him something besides what he learned in Belle Isle."

Well, somehow Dad always *did* seem to think I needed taking down every little while. All the same, I heard him say to Mother, out in the kitchen: "Well, I guess Dick is all right after all. I thought, one while, that he was going to turn out one of these smart, overreaching Yankees; but I guess that what he has seen in Belle Isle has just disgusted him with smartness," says Dad.

Disgusted? Well, I should say! It made me feel as if I was learning to smoke all over again!

But we all of us stood around Dad and braced him up; and Tad and Emerson said they would help pack up and mind what Mother told them, the same as they would if Dad was there to enforce discipline. And they *did* do better than I did; because I figured it out that I had got to hurry along down to the High School, so as to begin the fall term bright and early, and not get distanced in the battle of life; and afterwards, when I thought it over, I wished I had been licked for it.

And that shows what lovely specimens even the best of us are; and even after you think you have got your eyes open, you will keep on being a hog for about seventeen years longer. But I gave good advice to Tad and Emerson; and Irene said that Mother could depend on her; and she could; and Dad said he felt encouraged.

And then, Amsy Jenks and Eli Teak dropped in

and told Dad what a lot of good he had done, and how the town had never experienced such an influx of moral stimulus, and so on. And Mrs. Amsy and a lot of



MRS. AMSY DROPPED IN.

women dropped in and said the same thing to Mother and a good deal more that wouldn't bear repeating, out-

side of the family, till Dad felt considerably chirked up. Which shows how grateful a minister will be for next to nothing.

"And as for Belle Isle," says Dad, "Dick can say what he likes; but *I* know that this is the *friendliest* little town we ever lived in; and I never had a church that treated me half as well as this one."

Well, when I heard that, I hadn't another word to say. I just went out and sat down on the front door-steps and looked at that town and said to myself, that if this was the friendliest town in the whole United States, what must the rest of them be?



CHAPTER XXXV

ALL ABOARD FOR BOSTON

AND so, it was all settled that we were to be unsettled. And then came the packing up and the farewell sermon and the good-bys and all that. Dad was to go ahead and look up a house for us, and the rest of us were to follow along as soon as we were packed up and got the word from Dad.

Well, the people will generally turn out to a farewell sermon, because I suppose they feel sort of remorseful as they think of how they all went back on the minister one by one, and stayed at home hugging their cussedness and making up excuses for themselves. And they always think it is the minister's fault that they have behaved so mean and good-for-nothing; and maybe it is, or they wouldn't have got the chance; if you want to see how it feels to have a whole drove of mules kicking you at once, just enter the ministry, and you will see. Oh, yes, the ministry is a nice, easy, pleasant profession and I advise every one to enter it and live happily ever after.

Well, Dad's last sermon was on, "It is expedient

for you that I go away;" and he said that the best fruits of our experience together always came when it lay behind us in the past, where we could think it over calmly and make up our minds about it without the dust and noise of everyday events, which had blinded and deafened us for the time being. And he went on to say that often the best things that were said to us, or happened to us, seemed wholly in vain for the time being. The Man of Nazareth had that experience in his parish, Dad said; and yet, *he* had had faith to believe that after *he* was gone, they would think better of what *he* had said; and so would the Belle Islers, though Dad was conscious that he was a very poor expounder of the Man of Nazareth. At the best, Dad said he could only claim to have been very plain and straightforward with them; but nevertheless he believed that a man's best was not wholly in vain; and that when his voice was as good as silent to them forever, they would think it all over and conclude that maybe he was more than half right. "When the wounds of the ploughshare are healed," says Dad, "and the field is proud of the harvest, then first is the husbandman justified, and the earth itself proclaims, 'He hath wrought a good work upon me.'"

That was about all there was to it; and yet, I never knew one of Dad's sermons to have so much effect. L. S. Blood mopped his eyes and blew his nose good

and loud two or three times in the sermon; and afterward he tried to say something to Dad and gave it up, and went off mopping his eyes and blowing his nose.

And Fenton and Gerry and Uncle Dan'l Crump and the rest stood around looking all broke up; and Eli Teak said, "Well, Elder Newman, you've done your duty by this town; and if the rest of us haven't done ours, that's our lookout, and not yours."

And Bill Grey stood and looked around and said nothing for a while, till at last he said to me, "Well," says he, "if they all of 'em feel so bad about having the minister go, what's the use of his going?"

And that was just what I couldn't see, either. But you will notice a lot of people in this world taking tearful farewells of the minister and the whole ten commandments; but it's farewell, just the same. I suppose they need rest, as Emerson said when Mother told him to come in and wipe the dishes. "I need rest, Mother," says Emerson, when he hadn't done a thing for a month; and yet, the first thing he had to do he needed rest; and I suppose that's how it is with the church people. Just why it is that church people get tired so quick of hearing the minister praise up God and run down the devil, I don't know nor pretend to, but I know that that is always the way with them; and the least thing you say against the devil is sure to make them so tired that they have to go to bed.

Dad said on the way home that there were a lot of good people in this town, with no more than the ordinary failings of humanity, and he should always remember the kindnesses we had received from them; and that on the whole, he should look back on this pastorate as about the pleasantest four years of his life.

Well, I suppose that Dad was right, and that that was the way a minister ought to feel, no matter what they do to him; all the same, *I* felt as if there were a few good people in that town that I would like to kick.

Well, the main trouble with ministers is, they think the church is the whole dog, when it's nothing but the tail, and business is doing the wagging (at least, that's what Mother said, or words to that effect; and you don't fool *her* much; and I take after her). Of course, there is now and then a minister like Dad who grabs the dog by the tail and swings it round his head a few times; but the minute he loses his grip, you'll see the dog rush in and bite his legs. This has happened to Dad no end of times; and yet, you can't make him see the point! Dad thought, when he came to Belle Isle, that with such a lot of good people to preach to, it would be easier than nothing to wean them from Mammon and put God back on his throne; but I guess he found out before he left that Ephraim was joined to his idols, and no mistake; and that when

business cracks the whip, the church is the snapper to the lash.

We sold off all the furniture but Dad's books, because the good railroads were going to hold us up for more than the price of it; and that was where we made our mistake; because we ought to have known by this time that in avoiding the Scylla of railroads, you run onto the Charybdis of furniture dealers, as the poet says; and that the only safe rule for ministers is to hang on like grim death to what little they have got.

At first, we were going to have an auction; but knowing the good people of this town as we did, and how good they were at getting things knocked down to them for a song, we decided, on the advice of L. S. Blood, to mark the things ourselves at a fair price and let the good people take them or leave them, just as they liked. The result was that they snapped them up at our price, knowing that they were getting bargains anyhow, at about half what Arthur Wiley would have charged them.

And Mother hated to see the poor things go so cheap, when we had paid for them with blood and tears and groanings that could not be uttered; and every little while she would go off by herself and bury her face in a handkerchief; and it was a sad and solemn time for us, such as ministers must expect, if they *will* be such fools as to go into a business in which they have not

where to lay their heads or their furniture, either, any more than they had in the year one. Which shows what the gospel has accomplished in two thousand years.

And we were grateful to L. S. Blood for taking six cords of split hard wood of us at three dollars a cord, which was just what we asked him, without saying a word about the price. And the Gerry family let us have tickets at reduced rates, when they might have made the usual profits that agents got; and nobody seemed to want to make anything more out of us, now that we were going for good. It just brought the tears to your eyes to see people being so good all of a sudden!

And Hal Goodrich and Sam Gerry were both willing to drive Irene over to Fairmount depot; but as Hal had asked her first, she had to go with him; so Sam took Mother and Tad and Emerson instead; and I went by the stage, about two weeks ahead of the rest, (fool!).

But before that, we had our last farewell party at Deacon Goodrich's; and Kitty and Mildred and Alice and Irene, and Bill and I and Hal and Sam, and Charlie Taggart and Tommy Dodge, and all of us were there, having the last good time we were ever going to have together; only, you don't have as good a time at such times as you do at others. I could see that Hal and Bill and Sam were all thinking of Irene; but you couldn't

tell which of them she was thinking of; and as for Bill, he behaved like a man, as he always did.

And then I wondered what Kitty was thinking of (because you couldn't tell by looking at her, either); and whether she despised me for not asking her to go to that dancing school; and whether she knew that I knew that I was too young to get married yet a while, and that I would first have to go through college; and probably by that time she would forget all about me and be married to some one else!

And just as I was thinking of these things, and feeling bad enough anyhow, along comes the Deacon and says to me, "So your father's gone, is he? Well, Dick," says he, 'Truth crushed to earth shall rise again. The eternal years of God are hers; but error, wounded, writhes in pain, and *dies among her worshippers.*' Remember that, Dick," says the Deacon, with a peculiar look of satisfaction in his eye.

Now, at first, I thought the Deacon was trying to console me for Dad's failure to get the Belle Islers to worship God instead of Mammon; but the next minute, I saw by the chuckling look on his face that he wasn't any such thing; he was just crowing over me because we were through with Belle Isle. Fire and brimstone and Mammon had been crushed to earth by Dad, and now that he was gone, they would rise again, and leave business alone. *That* was what the

Deacon meant, I suppose, unless, maybe, he referred to the way he and Jewem and Pinchem rose again after buncoing Belle Isle and pocketing seventy-five dollars out of our family? And now, here he was, adding insult to injury and crowing over the superior soundness of his doctrine!

But that is what you can expect from people whose doctrines are sounder than yours are. They will never lose a chance to kick you, if they can help it. After that, I was disgusted with the Deacon, and so was Irene, who happened to overhear what he said to me, and who looked as if she didn't care much whether he was ever her father-in-law or not. But Kitty looked sort of startled and hurt and sorry, as much as to say, "Please excuse us, won't you, just this once; because Father is such a good man!"

So I excused Kitty, anyhow; and Irene put her arms around her and hugged her tight and looked at me as much as to say, "Don't you wish you were in my place?" And I tried to excuse the Deacon, considering that he was Kitty's father and was so sound in his doctrines that he didn't know any better; but it was pretty hard work, just the same, because revenge is sweet indeed — ah — as Charlie Taggart said; and only for Kitty, the Deacon would have got something that was good for him.

But a lot of people in this world get off cheaper than they would, if it wasn't for their relations.

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOW DAD WAS REWARDED

AND that wasn't the last trick that the Deacon played on us, either, let alone the rest of the good world; and this last one was a little the meanest. Mother told me all about it afterwards, but I just as lief tell it here as anywhere.

The way of it was that Irene and Hal Goodrich had been engaged for some time back; and on that last ride that they took to Fairmount depot, Hal played the baby act, and said that his father and mother thought they had better break off the engagement for a year, as they were both of them so young, so that they could both be sure of themselves; and then, at the end of the year, if they both of them felt the same as ever, they could renew the engagement. That was what his father and mother advised him to tell Irene, and what he actually *did* tell her on that ride to Fairmount depot, after he'd been working hard for about four years to get Irene and hadn't got her yet, if he did but know it. I called it about the meanest trick that was ever played on us by the Deacon, or any one in Belle Isle.

Any two parents that would advise their son to act

like a baby, especially to a girl like Irene, who was so much smarter than he was that it would be a sacrifice for her to take him at any price, — any two such parents as that would have my opinion of them; and any son that would take such advice ought to be kicked clear from Belle Isle to Boston and back again.

And that was precisely what happened to Hal Goodrich about one year later, when he came on down to Boston with a ring and offered it to Irene. And Irene just quietly took it and said nothing, till Hal had got back to Belle Isle and spread the news all over town; and then she sent back the ring and wrote him that all was over.

Irene was a little the worst girl to fool with that ever was; and I guess the Goodrich family realized it, at last. Anyhow, the whole of them were madder than hops at our family for the way Irene treated Hal, though they seemed to think the way he treated her beforehand was all very nice, — keeping her in the frying pan for a whole year, while he made up his mind and while all the girls crowed over Irene.

But that is the sort of thing you can expect from people with a little spare cash that belongs to other people. They always think they can treat you anyway they please; and when they have to swallow some of their own medicine they think they are the worst-abused people alive.

Well, I suppose it *was* hard on the Goodrich family to have the rest of Belle Isle crowing over them and saying it served them right, all except those who bowed down to the Deacon's pile; and these people said they supposed that Irene thought that as Hal's family had so much more money than hers had, she ought to give him up.

It would make a hyena sick at his stomach to hear the way some people will truckle to six dollars and fifty cents; and yet, half the people you meet will get down on their faces and wallow before that amount or less.

They ought to have heard Irene after she wrote that letter and sent it off with the ring! "There!" says she. "That's done with, and I'm glad of it. Maybe, next time, Hal will know how to treat his betters. As for his family after the way they've acted, I think they need taking down a little."

"Well, as for Hal," says I, "Bill Grey was worth a dozen of him."

"Who said he wasn't?" says Irene.

"Oh, you think so now, do you, Iyee Wowo?" says I. "Well, it's a pity you didn't think so a little sooner."

"Never you mind what I thought," says Iyee Wowo. "Only," says she, "if you and Will really wanted anybody, why didn't you have spunk enough to say so? Hal, at least, had spunk enough for that."

Well, that shut *me* up, because it was true; and after all, I *was* a little sorry for Hal, because, I suppose he really did care for Irene; only it wasn't Bill's fault that he kept still, because he supposed, of course, that Hal was the man. And I was also sorry, because Kitty was out with the whole of us; as if we had anything to do with it! Of course Hal was Kitty's brother, and all that; but I never held *her* to blame for Hal's playing the baby act; and she ought to have known that I never would have treated *her* so. No, sir; if I had got Kitty, and Dad had come to me, for instance, and said: "Look here now, Dick, you and Kitty are too young to be in love, and she's got nothing but beauty and sense, and so on, whereas our family is pretty well fixed, you know, after that Jewem and Pinchem failure. Now, Dick, you be a good boy, this time, and tell her what we say about it, and get her to put it off a year; and by that time, maybe you'll see some one with more money."

If Dad had dared to approach me with any such tommy-rot as that (which he never would have done, mind you), I would have turned on him like a thousand of brick, and said: "Look here, Dad, you can go to, go to, as the poet says, and stay there till you are wanted. Who's doing this, anyhow?"

That's what I would have said in Hal's place; and Kitty ought to have known it; and yet, she was a regular

refrigerator, the first time we met in Boston, and that was after Iyee Wowo was dead and gone too!

Well, I hate everybody every time I think of Iyee Wowo; because she would have been alive at this minute if it hadn't been for the ministry, and the good people that Dad supposes to exist, and who seemed to have decided between them that starving to death was the proper reward for preaching the Golden Rule doctrine. Mother said she supposed we deserved it, and all we could expect was a Christian burial. But Dad said there were lots of good people in this world, who hungered and thirsted after righteousness; and all he had to do was to preach his convictions (because that was the way to preach well, he said), and there would be sure to be *some* church that would respond to his message.

But there wasn't. There was nothing but churches whose God was their belly, and whose hope was in boodle, and who said their prayers to the almighty dollar; and the minute they heard there was a man around that wouldn't bow the knee to Baal, the same old thing happened; and the word went forth through all Israel that the Rev. Elijah Newman was *unsafe;* and that scared the vacancies so that most of them wouldn't let Dad within shooting distance; and those that *did* hear him by mistake, didn't hunger and thirst to hear him again, but said unto him: "Depart from me. I am a sinful man."



IYEE WOWO.

And at last Dad couldn't get a thing to do, in the ministry or out of it; and had to sit round and eat his vitals and see his children put to work at two dollars per week, if we could get it, when we ought to have been in school, and think it was all his fault for fooling with the Golden Rule.

So that is what you get for being true to your convictions, unless you are convinced that the Belle Islers are all right just as they are, and don't need anything but a little patting on the back. Oh, yes, there are lots of good people in this world!

Well, I decided it was about time to show the family what literary ability was good for; so I got out that Belle Isle manuscript which I had been preparing on the quiet for this very emergency; and I tell you, there was a stack of it by this time; and having made it turn out all right by my marrying Kitty (which was the only lie in the whole book, mind you; and even that was *going* to be true, if I lived, of course), — well, as I was saying, having thus wound it up in the usual style, I took it to a publisher who kept it two months and then said it was unavailable.

Then I took it to seventeen other publishers, who all said the same thing, as if they had rehearsed it together; and at last I up and asked one of those publishers what was the matter with that book, anyhow; and he smiled sarcastically and said there was too much genius

in it for their concern; and I told him I guessed that was what ailed it all right, judging by the tons of fool books he had in stock. And then every one laughed like demons; and that smart man nearly died of spite.

Well, maybe that did him *some* good; anyhow, it did me; and after that, I took that book home and buried it in the bottom of a trunk, vowing with tears in my eyes that *never* should the world see it again till it was worthy of it. And I tore up that last chapter and am writing this one instead, so that when the time comes, if it ever does, the good world will know what the truth is like.

So that was how I came to the rescue of the family, and, I tell you, it knocked all the conceit out of *me*. And Dad had about the same success hunting for any kind of a job at a dollar a day; and we got way behind with the rent and everything else, and Mother said she guessed that God had turned his face away from us.

So we lived on what the dogs would turn up their noses at, and in an old kennel of a house, till we all ran down in health and the best one of the whole lot of us was done for.

Poor little Iyee Wowo! She caught an awful cold, going to her work one sloppy day; because she was the mainstay of the family about that time, as Dad and the rest of us couldn't get a thing to do, times being so hard and jobs so scarce; and Iyee Wowo *would* go,

in spite of all we could do to stop her, because the good foreman had threatened to discharge her the next time she missed a day; and the result was, she waded through the slush and caught her death of cold, and that was the end of her.

I used to look out for her sometimes, when she was sick, and talk about Bill and Kitty and all of them, and carry her from one room to the other, and she got so awful light in my arms that it scared me. And then, one morning, I came down stairs, and Mother came out of the front room with a solemn look on her face, and told me that Iyee Wowo was gone.



CHAPTER XXXVII

BACK FROM OUTSIDE

FIVE years later, a Harvard Sophomore rolled into Belle Isle in a railroad train, got off at the new depot back of the old Academy, and was driven through town in triumph by pretty young Mrs. George Kendall; and I was that Sophomore. Or, come to think of it, I had a right to call myself a Junior, now that Commencement Day was over; only, it takes time to get over feeling like a Sophomore.

Well, it was bouquets all the way, as it were, with a regular ovation of "Hello, Dick!" and "How are you, Dick?" and "There's Dick Newman, back from outside!"

It was a bright morning in July, and Belle Isle was looking her prettiest, with everything in bloom, including the girls, and the stream shining like Psyche's mirror, over behind the Deacon's house, and fresh paint and new buildings and smiles on all the faces, and so on.

Well, this was different, certainly, after going away a mere minister's son, to return a sure enough Sophomore, bearing your sheaves with you!

Yes, there were lots of good people in Belle Isle; and as for those people that I had wanted to kick, I couldn't seem to see any such people, though Bill said they were there, all the same. But as for me, I hadn't been to college without learning to philosophize all that and confute the errors of Bill, who was still ignorant of the great and saving truth that Natural Selection explained everything. But of this, more anon. Meanwhile, I argued with Bill and tolerated his blindness.

Well, from that time on till September fifteenth, I was the guest of the Pearsons and the Jenkses and the whole town, for that matter; and it was picnics and dinners and suppers and glad hands everywhere; just as it was when Dad first came to Belle Isle and began butting his head against Natural Selection. What a pity to make all that trouble with the Golden Rule, when the Survival of the Fittest would have gone down like hot cakes! But, of course, Dad did his best. We all do, of course; and some of us survive and become Sophomores and get the glad hand right and left, and it's "Bob, old boy, how are you?" and "Charlie, you rascal, put it there!" and "Why, Mollie, is it possible!" and "Can this be little Leila Jones?" and so on!

Oh, it is fine to be one of the fittest and feel how well the law of Survival works, if you keep on the right side of it!

But what a swath Old Time had cut in the ranks of the Belle Islers! Dr. Barker gone, and Editor Stackpole; and nobody to take their places but a couple of young sprigs with no snap or vim or fire of their own; but just aping their great predecessors; the "Sunrise" man affecting a thunderous and declamatory soundness, and the "Star" man a snappy and scintillating radicalism that made you sick every time you thought of the real thing that used to emanate from those two sanctums. I wandered into the "Star" office and gave one look around and wandered out. It was too much. Where, now, was the genial Doctor with his quips and cranks and wanton wiles wherewith he had kept the town a-roaring at Editor Stackpole's expense?

And poor old Uncle Stack! How hard he worked to reverse the law of Evolution and make the chicken return to the egg, and the man to the cradle, and so on! "Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight," was the burden of his song; and who could blame him much at his age? Really, come to look around, the old times *did* seem a little bit better, somehow, with all of us young and hopeful together and Iyee Wowo alive. But I mustn't think of that, because it made even Evolution look dark.

And good old Mr. Gerry was over there with her somewhere; and half of our leading men had their names carved on tombstones, out in the old graveyard,

[illegible] Well, [illegible] is only [illegible] a certain [illegible] that seemed a [illegible] mystic [illegible]. But I will [illegible] this [illegible].

And Tommy Lodge was gone, too. Poor old Tommy! It [illegible] me a [illegible] if now I had got the better of him [illegible] we ever [illegible] together, though he [illegible] to me at the time. And I wished now that he had been right, but it was too late now, and I should always have to remember how mean I had been to him [illegible]. But of course it was all a part of Natural Selection.

And [illegible] L. S. Bissel too! When I heard that L. S. was gone I was sorry for the hard feelings I had once entertained against him on account of that watch deal, which he was simply conducting in accordance with a natural law of which I was ignorant at the time; but now I remembered his jolly laugh and his other good points, and how he had stuck to Dad till the last gun was fired.

But old John Skinner was still walking the streets with his mouth wide open, and ready to swallow anything that came his way. It looked as if old John was never going to die as long as any one was left alive to pay him interest money.

Well, old John was certainly a conundrum for a

scientist; but, of course, we must have faith in Nature's laws.

And Arthur Wiley still lived, though smarter men had moved into town and were showing him how to do business, so that there was hope of his being ultimately eliminated by Natural Selection. (I made a note of this point and sprung it on Bill; but he said that Arthur was a Sunday-school scholar to the new ones that were eliminating *him;* and I called Bill a pessimist, and he called me a "so-called optimist." But that argument will keep till I get through with the romantic part of this chapter.)

Alice Dodge and Charlie Taggart were married, — of *course;* and Nellie Fenton and Walt Gerry; and Sam Gerry and a pretty girl from Fairmount; and Ethel Pearson, who used to be the prettiest girl in Belle Isle, and was as pretty as ever, was now Mrs. George Kendall and was home from Boston on a visit, and had a pretty little girl of three who flirted with you, just like her mother, and was the cutest little thing alive.

And Henry Gilly was still showing up the churches and proving that atheism was the only religion that could turn out honest men. And our people had built a new church on Bridge Street on the lot of land that Uncle Dan'l Crump gave them; and were taking their medicine from a new minister as much like Dad as two peas, Bill said; and therefore they would probably get rid

of him before long. Yes, Bill was a pessimist, and no mistake!

And Amsy Jenks was the same tall Samaritan as ever, lending things right and left and never getting them back. I owe him a month's board bill at this minute, to say nothing of wear and tear on his shot-gun, and jointed fish-pole and top buggy, and so on. "And now, Dick," says Amsy, blandly, "if there's anything you want, you'll be sure to mention it, now, won't you?" says he, as if he was afraid I would forget something.

And Charlie Barlow had been to California and back again, and decided that Belle Isle was good enough for him. And Hal Goodrich was gone to Australia. Poor fellow, our score had been settled this long while; and Hal had taken me along with him as far as New York City, and paid all the bills and treated me like a brother, but never said a word about Iyee Wowo. Poor old Hal! I dare say he meant all right, and his father and mother, too; only, it is always these little mistakes that cost us the most; and besides, maybe I, too, had made a little mistake of my own, so that I couldn't afford to be quite so hard on Hal as I thought I could.

Then, again, perhaps I was a trifle readier to call it square with the Goodrich family, because Natural Selection had just taken a fall out of them, as it were.

The Deacon was out of business now and out of pocket, too, people said, owing to the fact that when he and Jim Cheatham dissolved their partnership, Jim had managed to dissolve most of the Deacon's share along with it. And the Deacon was bitter against Jim and said that this was the reward you got for taking a boy out of the streets and teaching him all you knew, and making a man of him. "And the result is," says the Deacon, "that here I am, an old man, robbed and betrayed by an ungrateful whelp that owed me everything; and then they take him up and send him to Congress for it!"

Yes, that was precisely what happened to Jim, the minute they realized what a flower of the family they had in him; and now Jim was operating on a national scale, and had several big legislative deals on that would land him in the Senate, if successful.

A few reformers, led by the "Star," had tried to down Jim by making political capital of his record; but the people rose in their might and vindicated Jim at the polls with an overwhelming majority.

As Arthur Wiley put it in Fenton's store: "The question before us is simply this: *Have you got the money?* If not, shut your damned head."

Bill quoted this to me and added that he supposed *that* was the survival-of-the-fittest platform. Anyhow, it was the platform that Jim Cheatham was elected

on, Bill said; and then got away before I could think up a crushing rejoinder.

"*Down* on him?" echoed Henry Gilly, when I expressed surprise at Belle Isle's choice of a standard-bearer. "Why, damn it, they *admire* him! What do little devils admire? Why, big devils, of course! Your father tried to get 'em to admire something else which he called God; but you mark my words," says Henry, "the graveyard is the only cure for *them.* When this generation is in the plundered earth, maybe you'll see some improvement; but anyhow you'll see *that* much."

Well, I tried to encourage Henry with the glad tidings of the Survival of the Fittest, but he only waxed profane and said: "Survival of the devil! Look here, young feller, what in *hell* have they been stuffin' you with down there?"

And then Henry mounted his gig and drove off at a fast trot for Cattle Hill.

Well, the Deacon was a sadder and a wiser man, and a kinder-hearted, too, I judged, by the hospitable way he shook hands with me, and said a good word for Dad, and invited me round to see the folks; and I said certainly; I should be delighted.

Of course, I had come back to see the whole of Belle Isle, and not any one in particular; so of course I wasn't going to set the whole town a-talking by calling

on Kitty the very first thing. But I might have saved myself the trouble; because the town was talking already, not about Kitty and me, but about Kitty and another young man whom she had met last summer at Old Orchard, or somewhere.

Mildred mentioned it, the minute she saw me, — not to me, but *at* me, through Alice Dodge Taggart, and one or two others who were having an old-time gossip at the Fenton house.

"Kitty had quite a desperate flirtation at Old Orchard, this summer, didn't she?" says Mildred. "Shouldn't wonder if she'd found her fate at last!"

I knew that a corner of Mildred's eye was on me, so I never batted an eyelash, but looked pleased and interested, and said I was glad to hear it, and that Kitty deserved the best there was a-going. (A man is not a Sophomore for nothing; and one of the first things you learn in college is to keep a straight face while the inquisition is going on.)

Besides, as to this flirtation of Kitty's, give the girl a chance, *I* said. Of course, if she was engaged, that settled it; but if it was a mere flirtation, it might be overlooked, considering that girls will be girls; though I had always supposed that Kitty was above such frivolity. True, there were several pretty faces back in Boston, — but let that pass. Enough that I was not engaged, anyhow; while at the same time, I was ready to over-

look the Old Orchard flirtation as a mere incident in the evolution of Woman. Moreover, we must not expect to survive, unless we were the fittest. *Was I the fittest?* that was the question.

And so, one bright midsummer afternoon, I found myself marching very calmly and coolly up the driveway of the Deacon's place, whistling a little, not to keep my courage up, — mercy, no! My courage was tiptop! — almost alarming, in fact! Never had I expected to make this call on Kitty without a wildly beating heart, and so on; and yet here I was, whistling away like one of the birds, and noting the curious changes that time had made in me and Belle Isle and everything!

Somehow, for instance, the Deacon's mansion wasn't so big any more — that is, it wasn't to me, though I could see it was as big as ever to the Belle Islers. And the stream looked narrower, though it was full to the brim; and the whole town looked smaller, though it had grown like anything in the last five years.

And Kitty was cool and calm and collected, too, when she met me at the door! She was the same beautiful Kitty as ever, with all the additional graces of the grown-up young lady, and with nothing of the refrigerator about her any more. (Was that a good sign, or a bad one?) "Why, here is Dick!" says she, in the kindliest way in the world; and then shook hands



like an old friend, and led me into the parlor and sat and looked at me without a blush or a quiver!

No, I wasn't disappointed in Kitty: I was disappointed in the situation — to see the both of us sitting there as cool and calm and unfluttered as cucumbers! Time was when I could hardly have sat on that chair in Kitty's presence without balancing myself; and now it was no trouble at all!

There was no ring on Kitty's finger that could be spotted for an engagement ring; but there was an engaged look in her eye — the look that good girls wear when there is some one else, and they are doing their best for you under the circumstances. (If I were a girl, I would practise some other look before the glass, so as to have it handy for callers.)

Then we talked about old times, and I asked about the Jenks boys; and Kitty drew down her mouth and said, "Oh, they play billiards."

"So do I," was my cheerful response; but Kitty's mouth remained down, and the best she could do was to change the subject.

Then a happy inspiration, with a smile on its lip and a tear in its eye, reminded me of Iyee Wowo embracing Kitty in this very room, and I ventured a playful allusion to the incident. It was what you might call a leading question, but you can judge for yourself. I said: —

"Say, Kitty, do you remember that farewell party of ours, and how you and my sister stood right there, like a pair of clinging vines, and Iyee Wowo looked at me, as much as to say —"

The rest was silence, because Kitty was blushing for sure, this time; only, it wasn't the right kind of blush. No, it was one of those scared-to-death blushes that speak volumes of protest, such as, "Oh please, now, for pity's sake, don't! because it's no use, anyhow!" — and things of that sort.

"Yes, I remember your sister — very kindly," stammered Kitty, with the note of pardon in her voice, as if death had cancelled all accounts. Oh, Kitty, Kitty, how could you! Of course, Kitty had sided with Hal, and couldn't help showing it yet, but — oh, well, if this sort of thing went on, I should be quarrelling with Kitty in a minute. So I fell back on that very present help in trouble, a request to play me something; and Kitty played me the Dirge of a Lost Ideal, otherwise known as a Chopin Nocturne. I listened with bowed head to the beautiful, grief-stricken thing, and spoke fitting words at the end. Then, to my relief, and Kitty's too, I dare say, her father and mother came into the room and gave me a cordial welcome, and we all sat down and had a cheerful chat about the neighbors; for of such are the anti-climaxes of life.

The Deacon seemed more broad-minded than

formerly, and congratulated me on the new church our people had just built. It was the chance of a lifetime to remind the Deacon that "Truth crushed to earth shall rise again," and so on; but I spared him on Kitty's account, making twice that the Deacon had escaped annihilation at my hands without knowing it. No, revenge isn't always "sweet indeed, ah," Charlie Taggart to the contrary notwithstanding.

In short, I enjoyed the talk with Kitty's father and mother, whom I hadn't come to see and had never been in love with!

And so, I went away a disappointed man with a grudge against Old Time, the hoary Belle Isler, who was worse than old John Skinner, and left you not so much as an innocent romance. Old John would have left you that much, anyhow, provided there was no money in it for him.

Well, as for Kitty, I couldn't blame her a particle. What call had she to wait for a man who had never even asked her to go to dancing school; or worse yet, had asked another girl that he didn't want to go with?

And then, the time I hung that May-basket! I might at least have let Kitty catch me that time; but no, I must run like a scared cat, and never give her a glimpse of my coat-tails — fool!

And the day we nearly tipped over in the picnic-wagon, and Kitty grabbed me by the arm, as there

was nothing more wooden in sight! A fence post would have faced such music, but I never looked at Kitty for a month — idiot! dolt! numskull!

And so, first and last, I had let concealment prey on my damask cheek till there was nothing left to conceal; and what call had she to wait for such a nincompoop?

But Natural Selection explained it all. A disused function would disappear; and anything that couldn't survive wasn't fit to survive. And after all, wasn't Kitty just a trifle — that is to say, wasn't she, perhaps, a trifle too *good* for me — me who played billiards, and pitied the erring, and would have pitied the unfit, only, of course, it was wrong to do that?

And somehow that reminded me of Dave Nickerson. Dave wasn't exactly one of the fittest; and yet, I hoped he had survived, because I felt like having a good old-time talk with him, and raking the fiddle over, and so on. Yes, leave little Kitty alone, you dunce, and stop talking of sour grapes, and go have a good old confab with Dave.

So I went to Dave's door and knocked. No answer! Gone up street, maybe — to get a drink! Ha, ha, old Jack Falstaff, what would Belle Isle have done without you and your infinite deal of sack?

Back up street I went, keeping an eye out for Dave on the way. No Dave anywhere! Dr. Fenton's

store, old Fitz's store, Tub Wilkins's hotel — all vacant of Dave! All dead and lifeless, like champagne without the bubbles! It began to look ominous, and at last I decided to ask. — Ha, there was Uncle Dan'l Crump, over there on a box in front of his store! Uncle Dan'l would know for sure.

"Fine day," says I to Uncle Dan'l. "By the way, any idea what's become of Dave Nickerson?"

"That's just what I'd like to know myself, now that he's kicked the bucket," croaked Uncle Dan'l.

The champagne of life turned flat; the world looked drab color. "What," said I, incredulously, "Dave Nickerson dead?"

"Yes, and damned, too, I guess," said Uncle Dan'l, with gloomy satisfaction. "That Dave Nickerson was a bad man. He smoked and chewed and drank and swore; and he died just the way he lived, makin' jokes on his death-bed about the roastin' he expected to git from Old Nick for not raisin' as much Cain as church members, and about how he expected to meet us all in hell, anyhow, and we'd think it was heaven when we got there. And that's the way he died — runnin' on like that about a man that always *tried* to be honest and never drank nor swore nor chewed nor did anything he hadn't ought to. And then our minister had to go and attend his funeral, and make out that he wasn't as bad as some that pretended to be

better. I dunno who he meant by it, but I know that that was all *I* got for givin' 'em that lot of land for their new church; and that's all a man ever gits for tryin' to be honest and do a little good."

So Uncle Dan'l was still putting on coats, as usual, and suffering for the lonely and unrequited virtue of honesty!

And Dave Nickerson gone! Alas, poor Yorick! A fellow of infinite jest, the sparkle in our champagne, such as it was in Belle Isle! But nevermore should he sparkle here below. Really, it *was* quite a strain on the doctrine of Survival to think that Dave was dead and gone, while regiments of people with no sense of humor were cumbering the ground.

"Well, anyhow," said I to Uncle Dan'l, "wherever Dave went, he went like a man, didn't he?"

"Well, I dunno," croaked Uncle Dan'l. "Leastwise, he said it was nothin' for him, seein' he'd been used to it all his life."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A WRESTLE WITH BILL

WELL, there were lots of pretty girls in Belle Isle, making eyes right and left, and daring you to come on — girls who had been the merest infants when I left town, and whom I had toted home to their mothers on my sled or in my arms, when the little nuisances got stuck in the snow. Now the same job would have been more difficult, as well as more desirable.

There were Leila and Myrtle and Rose and May and Celia and Mollie and Marjorie and a dozen others — enough to make you dizzy! Bless their hearts, every one! Individually fair and collectively fairest! A bouquet of girls, in short!

I now had a new experience and fell in love with Woman — about the pleasantest love affair a man ever has. No racking heart-pangs or poisonous jealousies or dreadful doubts or maddening rage for possession — nothing of the kind, but simple, pure delight, like that of the grateful and ubiquitous bee, flitting from flower to flower, and humming contentedly all the while his

thanks to the Author of all beauty and sipping the sweets — well, no, not that, exactly; because, for one thing, every one of those girls was looking for her beau ideal; and their eyes said, "I am the rose thou shalt not wear," or words to that effect.

A fellow has to look out for himself when girls behave like that. Even wee little Alice Kendall, three years old, was the most desperate little coquette in Belle Isle, and kept me busy the whole summer quarrelling and making up, and falling out again; and that is the kind of thing that makes you enjoy yourself.

And Mollie Foxcroft told me it was no use for me to look at Kitty, because her family had too much money.

Well, that reminded me of Hal and Iyee Wowo, of course, and I flared up all of a sudden, and demanded of Mollie what in thunder she imagined I cared for their little trumpery village nabob; and I gave her to understand that a member of Harvard University was in a situation to look down with compassion on such a contemptible molehill as pecuniary grandeur, let alone the thirty cents' worth of the article that Belle Isle could exhibit. And Mollie was mad and I was glad, with the savage gladness of the iconoclast, kicking the gods of the heathen.

Besides, I knew well enough that Mollie's remark was a slander on Kitty, who was simply looking for

Prince Charming, just like any girl. And sure enough, Kitty's young man, who was introduced to me not long after, proved to be a fine fellow, in every way worthy of Kitty, but with no more money than I. However, Mollie's intentions were good, and she was a pretty girl herself; and so were Leila and Myrtle and Rose and the whole bouquet of them: all pretty girls.

Nevertheless, Woman is not *the* woman, as the bouquet is not the rose; and there is safety in numbers. In short, what kind of a state of mind was it that could compose the following poetic tribute and send it to the "Star" to be read all over Belle Isle?

A BEE SONG

Leila and Myrtle and Rose and May,
  Celia and Mollie and Marjorie,
Flowers of a summer that flits away,
  Hear the song of a humble bee,
  Leila and Rose and Marjorie,
Hear me humming a roundelay.

Where the dew is on the Rose,
  Where the Lily is young and fair,
Where the winsome Violet blows,
  Lo, the roving bee is there,
  Rose and Lily and Violet fair,
Lo, the love that comes and goes!

When the summer days are fled,
  When the flowers are gathered all,

When the autumn leaves are red,
  Hushed shall be the wanderer's call,
  While the autumn rain-drops fall,
Like the last tears on the dead.

Just to meet and then to part,
  Ah, that we are wanderers here!
Just to greet and then to start,
  Leaving all that was so near,
  Leaving all we held most dear,
In the old home of the heart.

Now I leave it to any one if Heine ever wrote anything to beat that? And I shed some tears over it, as you do when you write a really good thing, and thought of Iyee Wowo and Dr. Barker and Dave Nickerson and Tommy Dodge, and a whole lot of people that I should never see again in this world. But those girls must have got it into their heads that I was thinking of nothing but them; anyhow, they all turned up their noses at that poem, and said, they didn't thank anyone for calling them *summer* girls — as if I had called them any such thing! And they persecuted me with sly remarks, such as, "Here comes the humble bee!" and, "Oh, girls, have you heard the roundelay?"

Bill said that that poem was a mistake, from a practical point of view. "Girls may be flowers," says Bill, "but they don't want to be made love to in a bunch."

To hear Bill talk, you would say that he had been doing nothing for the last five years but make love, and study Political Economy, whereas, it is well known that college is the place where these sciences are mastered. Then again, I had it straight from the girls themselves that Bill never looked at one of them! Yes, it was high time to look into Bill's case and call his bluff, especially now that this bouquet nonsense was over with, and I had so much spare time on my hands.

The girls had all gone back on me, but there was faithful old Bill, with whom I took solid comfort hunting a little, fishing a little, rowing upstream to the old landings and back, and loafing around our old piratical camp-ground up in Mason's grove, and talking by the hour of the books we had read, and the questions we had settled. For a man who had never been to college, Bill seemed to have picked up an astonishing amount of information somehow, and was as ready as ever to argue a point.

In the old Academy days, Bill and I would have an occasional wrestle, physical or intellectual, just to see who was the better man; and sometimes it was Bill that got thrown, and more times it was I. But of course, that was before I went to college and learned a trick or two; so that now I felt prepared to tackle Bill with a different result in prospect. Bill needed tackling, that was certain, after all those slurs of his



on the doctrine of Survival; and in several other respects he was in an equally bad way.

For instance, Bill had just been reading a Utopian romance which pictured out an impossible civilization, founded on weak-kneed, altruistic principles, and running like clockwork. I asked Bill in a withering tone if he really supposed that *that* kind of a scheme could be made to work, and he said, "Why not?" — as cool as a cucumber!

For a moment I was struck dumb; then I turned myself loose on Bill, and proceeded to show him what he had missed by not going to college. (This happened on a log in Mason's grove.) I told him about the iron law of wages and the law of diminishing returns, and the law of supply and demand and of *laissez faire*, and the Economic Man and the whole Political Economy, Sophomore year; and I was just opening up on him with the Survival of the Fittest, when Bill interrupted me with a weary wave of his hand.

"Yes, yes," says he, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, as if they were old worn-out arguments, "I've read all that in Father Adam Smith and Mill, and so on; and to my mind," says he, "it is the Political Economy of Yahoos."

"Yahoos?" says I, horrified at Bill's blasphemy.

"Yes, or Belle Islers," says Bill, "whichever way you like. In other words, it's nothing but Arthur

Wiley and old John Skinner, and so on, reduced to a system. They are the men at present. But," says Bill, lighting up a fresh pipe —

> "'For a' that and a' that,
> It's comin' yet, for a' that,
> That man to man, the warld o'er,
> Shall brothers be, for a' that.'"

Well, I sat on that log and looked at Bill in amazement. To think of a man who would lug poetry into a serious discussion! I tried to reason with Bill, and show him that poetry was one thing and Political Economy another; but he got worse and worse and quoted Dad's old sermons to me, and insisted that the Golden Rule doctrine and the Yahoo doctrine didn't agree any more than heaven and hell, and that we must take sides with one or the other of them. "This dismal Yahoo science of yours," says Bill, "is nothing but a literal translation of that old fire-and-brimstone gospel that you used to despise; and yet, the minute some fool professor calls it Political Economy, you swallow it like hot cakes!"

"Nonsense!" says I. "The Economic Man —"

"Is a Belle Isler. Precisely," says Bill. "The Economic Man is nothing but old John Skinner skinning right and left. You always used to despise him, before you got so much education; but now you're cracking him 'way up as a pillar of society. And you

used to think that Belle Isle was a pretty good joke, when you wrote those articles for the "Star," but now to hear you go on, any one would think God Almighty had Belle Isle in mind when he laid the foundations of this universe!"

"Oh, come, come," says I, "you can't expect a man to go to college and —"

"Not lose his head. No, I should say not! What is it Emerson says about that? A man should have a mother wit that is invincible by his culture. He says that in 'Culture.' No, it's in 'Social Aims.' Anyhow, it's true, wherever he says it; but is it true of you? Not much! Your culture has knocked your wits higher than a kite. Why," says Bill, "that thing you wrote about Don Quixote had more horse sense in it than the whole of Harvard University!"

"That old thing?" says I.

"Yes, that old thing," says Bill. "You had a gift in those days. You could see through humbugs and show 'em up so that others could see through 'em; and now, what have they done to you — those Harvard humbugs? Cultivated that gift of yours? Hardly, or you'd have seen through *them* in no time. They've simply knocked it on the head, and sent you in a bill for the job; and *I* say it's a damned shame!"

It was the only time I ever heard Bill swear, and of course, I didn't feel especially flattered to be the cause

of a solitary instance of profanity; so I spoke up rather sharply and said: —

"Anybody'd think you were delivering a funeral oration, and I was the corpse!"

"That's just it, precisely!" says Bill. "First sensible thing you've said for two hours, or maybe longer!"

Well, I always detested personalities; and besides, what was the use of talking to a man who ran on in that unscientific way? I saw that nothing but a college training could protect a man from the influence of poetry, sermons, and "Star" articles. Ha, ha, those "Star" articles! It was a little too absurd that Bill should still be pinning his faith to such things. What, did he expect me, a Harvard Sophomore — or Junior, I should say — to go 'way back where I left off at fifteen years old, and begin all over again? Ha, ha, fancy me!

So I merely pooh-hooed Bill a little, as the professors do at college when you advance an idea, and let it go at that. Later on, no doubt, Bill would appreciate what I had said to him, after it had had time to soak in.

Coming home from Mason's grove, we passed our old house where Bill and I always used to separate, and stopped a minute to look at it.

Yes, there it was, the little brown two-storied house,

looking the same as ever, only, so small that I wondered how it could ever have held such a crowd of us, children and neighbors and all! There it was with the same green window shades, and the front parlor windows looking out on the road, and the big woodshed in the rear, and the big back yard where I used to discipline Tad and Emerson when they needed it. Poor little chaps, I was sorry for them now, and wished I had used more moral suasion. As if we didn't get discipline enough in this world without having our own family piling onto us!

And there, as we passed the corner, was the little front porch where Iyee Wowo used to stand and ask us in to supper. I saw that Bill was thinking of it, too; and it seemed almost as if Iyee Wowo would come out in a minute or two, and say, "Hello, Will, can't you come in to tea with Dick?" And ten to one, Bill would have said he was due at the barn, or something — just as I always lost all my chances with Kitty.

"Well, Bill," says I, with Spartan levity, "if those girls really wanted us, they ought to have been more explicit."

"Yes, they ought to have proposed to us," says Bill, sadly.

Then he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, as if they were the dead past that could never be recalled, and said, "Talking about the Survival of the Fittest,

maybe that means that you and I are better than your sister?"

Well, for a single instant, my thigh was out of joint, like Jacob's, as I remembered Iyee Wowo, and how she had worked to keep the wolf from our door; and died in the attempt; and how we had all of us nearly died with her, and how I had had to give up earning money this summer and come up here to Belle Isle to make sure of surviving, and a ghastly doubt as to my Political Economy — but no, absurd! Had I sweat and groaned and suffered and gone without, and all but killed myself for nothing but a gold brick, as Bill would have it? Perish the thought! The mere statement carried its own refutation, as Professor Potluck would put it. Besides, there was Natural Selection, anyhow, which explained everything; and we must have faith in Nature's laws, hard as it was at times. But of course, it was no use arguing with Bill, because if I did, he would say we weren't fit to live in comparison with Iyee Wowo, and what could I say to that?

So, if I forbore to annihilate Bill that time, it was because — well, in short, it was because of Iyee Wowo.

Well, I left Belle Isle that fall with my main object accomplished — *i.e.* with twenty pounds to the good, the friskiness of a colt, and no doubt whatever about surviving. As for other objects, such as finding out what had become of love's young dream, why, all that

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next time you come up here, bring along something you can live up to."

Well, Bill could say what he liked; but after all, what a big improvement this was on five years ago! Then I had gone away feeling bad and mad and ugly and stupid and blue — all because I was in love. Whereas now I was feeling bland and happy and magnanimous as an angel, who would ask nothing better than to see all those dear girls well married and living happy ever after; and if that wasn't better than being in love, what was it?

And then, before I knew it, I was thinking of a girl I had left behind me in Boston — a girl that didn't look a bit like Kitty or act like her, either! No, come to think of it, she looked like herself and acted like Iyee Wowo; and her name was Gwendolyn!

My, but she was keen, that Boston girl; and as soon as ever I got home, she made me tell her the whole story about Kitty, and how everything had ended in smoke. And there sat my Lady Gwendolyn listening, with a mocking look in her eyes and the pretty little curlycues at her mouth; and when I got through she said: —

"Ha, ha, how sad! Another ideal dissipated!"

The truth is, these Boston girls are all perfectly heartless.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE "FOOL KILLER"

HAVING now revealed to a waiting world the wonderful principles and practice of Belle Isle, —*quorum magna pars fui*,— it remains only to tell how Bill and I turned out, and how we not only lost our girls, but lost our faith in Belle Isle!

For that matter, of course, Bill never had any particular faith to lose; and what little I had couldn't have been fit to survive; anyhow, it was made short work of by the law of Natural Selection.

Well, it was an awful blow to the Belle Islers, who had looked for better things from both of us; and all I can say is that no one in Belle Isle was responsible for my downfall, except, maybe, Bill, a little, and I am not going to lay the blame on him, though he *was* the first to go wrong.

They say the day of miracles is past; but Bill says that the champion miracle of all history is that any one, with his training or mine, should have turned out anything short of a prominent politician; and he argues that it is a ghastly outlook for this whole coun-

try when two fellows with our early advantages could go back on their bringing up.

Well, Bill was a sly dog. Every one thought he was too lazy to live, much less to upset the universe; but Bill proved to them that laziness, properly invested, is a business asset to be reckoned with.

Bill packed up his things, one day, in a leisurely manner, and took a slow train for the West. Arriving there, somewhere, he looked out of the smoking-car window, and saw a hustling town about the size of Belle Isle, with nothing around it but *land!*

Well, Bill got off and bought up all the land in sight at next-to-nothing an acre, and then lighted a pipe and sat down, and waited for the town to boom. How Bill knew that the town was going to boom was a mystery to me. No town would ever boom for me like that, but the way this town boomed for Bill was a caution. In less than no time Bill's land was selling at fifty dollars an acre, netting him a little matter of five thousand per cent, or so. Then Bill sold half of it and bought more of the vacancy and re-bought and re-sold till his bank account was keeping him awake nights, worrying how to invest it.

Then he bought some more land and some Calumet and Hecla and an electric-lighting plant and a city railroad and I don't know what else. In short, Bill managed it somehow, though how, I haven't the least

idea. Some said it was land and some said it was water — in stocks; and Bill said it was just plain robbery, as usual; only, he had the money all made before he realized what he was up to. A likely story! But that was just his little joke, of course. All I know for sure is that there he was at last, with the goods on his person, and every one ko-towing to him, for all the world as they did to me when I cleaned out the crowd at snap-the-crack!

So far so good; and if Bill had only stopped right there, or gone on in the same way, nobody in Belle Isle, or out of it, would have said a word, and Bill might have been doing time in Congress at this minute, along with Jim Cheatham. But what does Bill do after starting all right, but continue all wrong! No sooner was he well fixed, than he took that money, which he had made by irreproachable business methods, (methods, mind you, which he had learned at the very knee of Belle Isle, if not over it), and used it to undermine and ridicule and bring to naught the very principles which had made and placed him where he was! (Henry Gilly of Cattle Hill.)

In other words, he started that radical and dangerous and innovating sheet the "Fool Killer," in which Belle Isle and all its works were held up to ridicule, and the great American people is pilloried as the dupe of quackery, knavery, and humbug unto this day!

It would frighten a virtuous public too much if I were to merely mention the things that Bill stood for in his paper; so I will simply say that there wasn't a thing that was obnoxious to old John Skinner, and all right-minded men that Bill didn't advocate in the "Fool Killer," and that forsaking the paths hallowed by the footsteps of Jewem and Pinchem and trodden by emulous and admiring millions, Bill had struck out into heretical and untried trails, and made mouths at the simple teachings of his childhood.

Think of that, will you! Why, for all the good it did Bill, old John Skinner might as well never have lived, except to point the moral and adorn the tale of the "Fool Killer."

Worse still, the thing seemed to grow, somehow, with Bill pouring the money into it, till it reached an incredible circulation, in view of the supposed soundness of the American People; yet there was the "Fool Killer," still a-climbing and leavening this land with Bill's pernicious and destructive heresies!

When I heard of Bill's first successes in land, I was naturally pleased. I saw that Bill's head was level, after all. He might dabble a little in air castles now and then, but when it came right down to business, it was his sound Belle Isle training that saved him.

Then, one day, I received a copy of the "Fool Killer," and my eyes were opened. Bill was hard at

work sapping and mining at the pillars of society! All this because he had never received a college education!

Well, I sat down then and there and wrote Bill at great length, warning him just what he was doing; and Bill wrote back that all I said was dub-dub. He had had this thing up his sleeve all along, he said; and now he was going to give the Belle Islers, big and little, a piece of his mind, and show them that they weren't so smart as they thought they were. The whole country, Bill said, was nothing but a big Belle Isle, or an aggregation of Arthur Wileys, old John Skinners, and so on, all doing what they could in a small way. He said that our great financial geniuses were nothing but Belle Islers raised to the thirty-second power; it was all Belle Isle writ large; and he was surprised that a man with my natural astuteness and college education had never found it out. And he added that he supposed, if he had gone to college, he would have learned better than this; he would have heard long lectures on the economic methods of old John Skinner and been brought to realize that such men were pillars of society and models for all of us.

Well, I wrote back to Bill in a forbearing spirit and asked him how, with his radical, altruistic views, he explained the condition of his bank account; and Bill wrote back that that was easy. "The American

People," says Bill, "are so sagacious and astute that they won't respect you till you show them that you understand the skin game all right; but after that, they are prepared to listen."

So that was how Bill was going on in the "Fool Killer," no doubt! Was it any wonder that so many good politicians and financiers wanted to lynch him?

Of course, the Belle Islers were scandalized at Bill's paper, especially when they heard it was making money; and then they said they saw what Bill was up to. I got this straight from Bill himself, who sent me a copy of the "Belle Isle Sunrise" with a long editorial on "The Degeneracy of American Journalism," illustrated with quotations from the "Fool Killer." But it only did harm, that editorial, because it advertised the forbidden fruit, which straightway got into the hands of innocent and unfallen Belle Islers, with the inevitable result of paradise lost and Henry Gilly as angel with the flaming sword.

Next, it was reported that old John Skinner had up and died of an editorial that he happened on in Bill's paper on "The Elimination of Sharks." But Bill said that this was a mistake, glad as he would be to appropriate the honor; and that what old John really died of was a bargain he drove with a Chicago man, who sold him the bottom of the Mississippi River and then skipped the country.

And so Bill became a byword and a hissing in Belle Isle and all over the United States. It was sad to think how Bill turned out, after starting so well!

Heavens, if they had known that the man who could eat Jim Cheatham up at one gulp, make a flapjack of Belle Isle, and finish off with the whole country — that *this* man, I say, was sitting quietly around, smoking a corncob pipe, taking the whole thing in, and biding his time for a *debut*, — what, I ask, would they have done to him? Lynched him, most likely, or sent him to Congress, according to the size of his pile when they made the discovery. But, like all great things in Nature, Bill passed unnoticed till it was too late.

Neither is this the worst of it, by any means, — oh, no! After grieving over Bill a considerable spell and mourning him for one of the dead, — and reading the "Fool Killer" right along to answer its sophistries, — my own faith began to totter (such are the fruits of a bad example), and I found myself on the downward road. Lower and lower I fell, till finally I slid down one step lower than Bill and landed in the *Ministry!*

And *such* a Ministry! "The Golden Rule with Whiskers," Bill called it, referring to my modest proposal for building the world all over again on up-to-date lines, and using the rubbish for kindling wood.

But Bill did me the justice to add that there was nothing mean or small about me; and that when I went in for anything, it was generally head-first. Bill said, it was an awful set-back that I got in college; but once I recovered my moral tone, it was lovely to see me revenge myself!

Of course, nothing remained but the light and agreeable task of convincing the public that all they need to be perfect is a new suit of clothes. (See "Sartor Resartus.") Strange, isn't it, how people will behave over a great great big compliment like that? The universal Belle Isle looks at me, just as it used to at Dad, and says "Oh, go 'long!" — and I go. I am put out of the synagogue every once in so often, pursued to distant cities by fanatical Belle Islers, and overtaken with fatal certainty by my just deserts. The way of the transgressor is hard.

Bill says, the only mistake I made was in not making a little money in land first; because, in that event, I could have walked all over the church people and welcome; whereas, as the case stands, it is just *vice versa*.

And that reminds me that, when the Belle Islers heard about my going into the ministry, they raised a laugh that was heard from the Red Lion to Tub Wilkins's hotel.

This laugh which the Belle Islers raised was partly at the contrast between my new profession and my

old record, and partly to think of the fun they would have with me, if ever I turned up their way with my doctrine.

But the laugh is on Belle Isle, after all; for I am beating them right along at their own game. I am making the big Belle Isle pay me for things that they don't want, — to wit, "The Golden Rule with Whiskers"; I am doing this right along, mind you, and drawing my well-earned salary for it, in spite of all their struggles to prevent me. Verily, the laugh is on Belle Isle.

To be sure, as soon as the Belle Islers realize their danger, it is all up; and my wife and I flee to another city, according to Scripture. That is, we flee according to Scripture to another city; because, of course, there is no such thing as a city-according-to-Scripture. In other words, we flee from a city-*not*-according-to-Scripture to another city-not-according-to-Scripture, leaving everywhere, I must confess, a swarm of friends as well as enemies, behind us; and in this way, we are seeing the whole United States of Belle Isle. *Das Ewig-Belle-Isliche* moves us along, to improve on Goethe a trifle. But travel is no bad thing with a nice girl for company.

Which reminds me that the girl I married was the heartless Boston girl who looks like herself and acts like Iyee Wowo, and whose name is Gwendolyn.

The truth is, I was so dead sure that Gwendolyn was heartless that I told her so to her face one day. Whereupon, what does she do but burst into tears and retort that I was heartless myself to tell her all about that Kitty business and then go deliberately to work to treat another girl the same way.

Then my eyes were opened and I saw that Gwen was right. I was the heartless one, not she; and the only *amende honorable* was to tell her so till she was convinced that it was no such thing. By that time we were engaged, of course, — in the very nick of time, too, just as another fellow was about to snatch her away forever!

To be sure, Gwen says it was no such thing: she wouldn't have had *him* for love or money; she was just flirting with him a little to bring me around, and so on.

Well, all I can say is, it *looked* dangerous, anyhow; and the only safe rule is to gather your rosebuds while you may.

Another curious thing about Gwendolyn is that one of the earliest vows she ever registered was never to marry a minister; and yet, the first temptation was too much for her! But matrimony and the ministry are both paved with good intentions.

And the Lady Gwendolyn has read all this over, of course. She had to, in fact, to make me the type-

written copy. And every now and then she would burst out laughing and exclaim: "It's absurd! It's ridiculous!" And then again, she would break off and run to me and say: "Oh, Dick, I can't do it! I can't! It makes me cry! It's mean! It's hateful! It's infamous!"

So that is how the Boston girl talks nowadays, — just like anybody; or rather, like nobody. She treats culture like an old story and resents the mention of Ibsen. Moreover, Bill says it is just the same with the western girl; she isn't western at all, Bill says; and he ought to know, because he married one of them.

Yes, married, I repeat! So, you see, Bill must have reformed his methods, or else it was leap-year when he was led to the altar.

And Eli Teak left the Law and went into the Ministry; and one day when he and I met in a railroad depot, Eli told me he was preaching Dad's doctrine right along and going him one better. By which I inferred whiskers on Eli's doctrine, too.

"Well, Eli," says I, wringing him by the hand as we do only unto those who agree with us, "well, Eli, is the world growing better or worse?"

"Worse," says Eli, "right along. At least, that's how it seems, though maybe we are only just waking up to things we were blind to before. As for me,"

says Eli, "I shall never get over my Belle Isle training, and I shall always have hard work to keep from being too smart. Why, even to this day," says he, "I can't even look at a pretty girl without wanting to steal her!"

And sure enough, Eli did steal her shortly after, and fled to a distant church with her to escape the wrath of female parishioners who declared that if there was one thing they never could abide in a minister, it was favoritism.

And so it goes. Man after man going wrong and no help for it! First Bill and then I and then Eli, and who next? Tad took a tumble long ago and Emerson is shaky; and who can be trusted to remain sound in these degenerate days?

To cap the climax, I became a regular contributor to the "Fool Killer," in prose and verse; and some of these poems in particular have become quite notorious, especially "The Laugh is on Belle Isle," and "Can This be Little Leila Jones!" and the "Epistle to Bill," — contributions, by the way, for which Bill sends me a liberal check every now and then, thus putting me in cahoots with the robbery stage of his evolution! Ye gods! but a minister's money is enough to make him sweat, — or would be, if he had any to speak of, as Bill says.

Yes, Bill is a sublimated Yankee, and no mistake;

and once he sets out to beat the world at any particular game, he will do it to a T; and no procession of Belle Islers will follow his coffin to a premature grave which they have dug for him.

The only time I ever knew Bill to bat an eyelash was when he rose from the perusal of this stern and veracious chronicle in manuscript and solemnly delivered his verdict.

"Well," says he, "it may kill 'em and it may not. Anyhow, it'll do no harm to try."

CHAPTER XL

THE EPISTLE TO BILL

THE other day, Bill and I made a flying trip to Boston and descended suddenly on Dad, intending to thank him for starting us on the downward road to our present perdition, and then carry him off to take a Thanksgiving look at a few of his grandchildren.

Incidentally I was going to drop in at Harvard and kick a few professors of Political Economy; but Bill said there was no time to do it properly, so I had better forgive them instead. I therefore take this earliest opportunity to extend a full and free pardon to my dear professors, ascribing all the merit to Bill.

Well, we found Dad living all alone in an upper tenement of a God-forsaken row of houses, such as they build especially for ministers to end their days in, if they can afford it. Bill and I agreed afterwards that we would have set the whole row afire and burned it to the ground; only, we were in such a hurry to get back home to our wives and children. Then again, Gwen and I were using up twenty-eight cents a week

on postage stamps, which was nearly our entire income from the Ministry.

Dad was all alone now, as Mother had gone to join Iyee Wowo in the country where the Golden Rule works and the architecture does not provoke incendiarism; and Tad and Emerson were away succeeding in Business and the Law, and beating me all to pieces, just as I expected. Bill and I looked around as if we ought to have seen Mother and Iyee Wowo sitting there somewhere, but there was no one there but gray old Dad and Bill and me.

And I had never attended Mother's funeral, even; because I was so far away out on the Pacific slope that I couldn't afford it; and what little I could afford, I sent to help bury Mother, just as she had had to do with her father and mother; for of such are the ordinary incidents of the Ministry.

And Bill never attended his mother's funeral, either, because he was dead broke at the time, and stranded in Nebraska, or somewhere; and one reason why we both of us believe in Utopia is because we think there ought to be a time when every fellow can afford to attend his mother's funeral.

Nobody to touch up my poems now, or admire them when nobody else will! — But I forget Little Gwen, who is also a little mother of poems, hers and mine.

Well, Dad was pretty glad to see us, of course, and we had a long confab about the good old times in Belle Isle and how nice and neighborly and pleasant everything used to be in those days. The conversation was all honey and pie, in fact, till Bill and I happened to unfold our grand hypothesis about the big Belle Isle, with the little one as a *reductio ad absurdum.* We supposed that of course Dad would be overjoyed with that hypothesis, and would exclaim, "I have not lived in vain!" or words to that effect. Instead of that, he said:—

"Look here, you boys are going it altogether too fast! It's all well enough to persuade people to do right, — if we *can;* but you don't want to meddle with the *pillars of society,*" says Dad.

Well, Bill tried to explain that as pillars of society, old John Skinner and so on had pretty near had their day, and that it was high time to found society on something that wasn't quite so rotten; but Dad couldn't seem to see it, somehow; and at last, I had to say to him:—

"Look here, Dad, you'll be the tail end of the procession, if you don't look out. Of course, Dad, we are grateful to you for the light and leading that you once furnished us; and now all you have to do is to sit back and say, 'sic 'em, boys,' and watch Bill and me attend to this Belle Isle business."

Of course Dad said, "Fudge, fudge," and remarked that if *that* was a sample of my pulpit style, it was no wonder I was always in hot water. "As for this paper, the 'Fool Killer,'" says Dad, "I should say that it's name alone would create uneasiness."

"Yes," says Bill, "that's just what we're up to."

"Ah ha! And so," says Dad, sternly, "you accept the Carlyle dictum that this country, like England, is composed of eighty millions, mostly fools!"

Bill said that that was as near the truth as you could get without using profanity.

"Fudge, fudge," says Dad, "the great American people will never stand for any such programme."

Then Bill used another argument. "Well, anyhow, the paper is paying," says he.

"Is that so!" says Dad, looking interested. "Say, just let me see it a minute, will you?"

Bill handed out a copy and Dad looked it over curiously to find out what it was that was making the money. "I see that you are addicted to mottoes," says Dad. "Here, for instance, in this column entitled 'Short-arm Jolts,' — by the way, what does that mean?"

"Oh, that's just an athletic expression," says Bill.

"Ah, I see," says Dad. "I *thought* I had seen it somewhere. Ahem! Well, among these jolts I find the following from Ruskin: 'I have a good hope



of disturbing the peace of England.' — Does that mean," says Dad, suspiciously, "that you are harboring designs against the peace of a country that was founded by Washington and — "

"It does," says Bill.

"Ah, I thought so!" says Dad, triumphantly. "And here again you — hello, what's this?"

And then Dad's face lighted up just as it used to when he came across one of my articles in the "Star"; and I looked over his shoulder just as I used to, and sure enough, he was reading my

"EPISTLE TO BILL

Old comrade Bill, have you forgot
How once, in old Belle Isle,
We two would steal forbidden fruit
To win our sweethearts' smile?

Ah yes, we robbed the orchard, Bill,
But missed the prize, I ween.
We stole some apples, Bill, but not
Sweet Kitty and Irene.

And one of them is married now,
And one is up above.
We lost them, Bill, because we were
So bold in all but love.

To think, with all our stealing, Bill,
We should such blunders make!
Would that the serpent of our Eden
Had told us what to take!

And we, God's orphans, blunder yet,
  And leave great deeds undone,
And win all prizes but the best,
  And dare all things but one.

Ah me, that we such fools must be,
  To use such knavish arts!
And oh the prize, were we but wise,
  To steal each other's hearts!"

Well, when Dad got through with the "Epistle," he cleared his throat and said, "Not bad, not bad! Some truth in it, too!" — as if that surprised him. "Well, well," says Dad, "Mother always said that Tad and Emerson would make the money, but Dick would write the poetry. And that little book that Dick published! She used to look it over in her last days and say — "

Here Dad broke off and went out in the hall by himself and shut the door; and we heard him blowing his nose like L. S. Blood, after that last sermon in Belle Isle. By and by, after a considerable spell, during which Bill and I sat with our eyes on the carpet, Dad came in again looking absent-minded, and walked the floor awhile, muttering to himself as he used to when he was getting up a sermon.

"Oh, well," says he at last, "maybe, after all, there is some call for these new views that you boys are giving us." (Bill and I were only about forty apiece.)

"And maybe," says Dad, "as character develops and civilization evolves, it is natural that they should seek new expressions, journalistic and otherwise; and maybe such enterprises are a sign that what little we older ones have done was not wholly in vain. Only," says he, "you don't want to be too hard on them, because there are lots of good people in Belle Isle."

"Yes, that's so," says Bill; "and when Dick and I get through with 'em, they'll be better than ever."



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